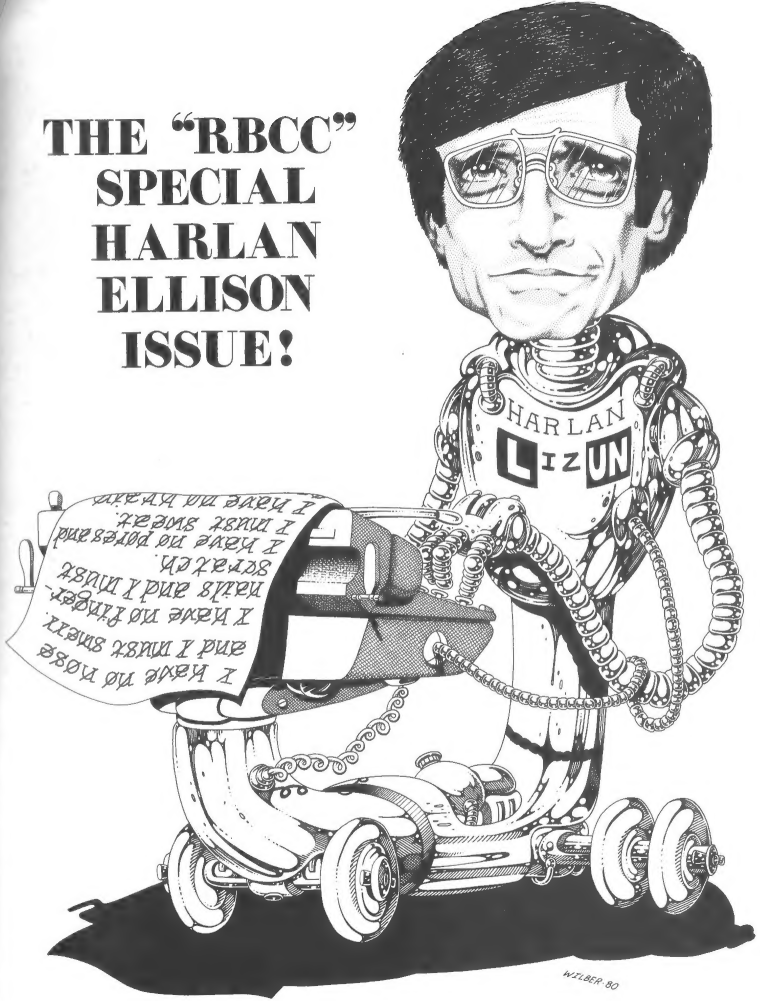
RBCC 151
$3.95
Harlan Ellison
Special

#118
OF
215

THE "RBCC" SPECIAL HARLAN ELLISON ISSUE!



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Frontispiece by RICHARD HARRISON GREEN
Page One by RON WILBER
Contents Page by BRET BLEVINS from "I Have No Mouth And I Must Scream"
Back Cover by GREG WEST
from "Delusion for a Dragon Slayer"

Special acknowledgements go to Patricia Lara from Bret Blevins for invaluable inspirational efforts in overcoming herculean artistic difficulties so that the work herein could at last reach completion.

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AUGUST 1980

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Contributions are always welcomed, but they should include return postage if you want it back.

THE ADVERTISING DEADLINES FOR THE NEXT TWO ISSUES OF THE RBCC ARE: AUGUST 15th
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This issue of the RBCC has caused me more sweat and grief than I could have possibly imagined. You subscribers will be reading this 8 months after the last issue, the longest lapse between issues in the history of the magazine. Those aren't the kinds of records I like to set. Bret Blevins said that I should just blame him because he delivered his strip and other artwork over a month after anyone else, but excuses just don't alter reality. This is my magazine and I'm totally responsible for it, no matter what. Believe me, this won't happen again for a number of reasons. First, I will no longer announce the issue number of planned special issues, thus I cannot be trapped into holding up publication of the magazine because I promised it would be such-and-so. Second, I'm going to accumulate a backlog of material from my more speedy artists so that I can keep my deadlines and publish even if someone cannot deliver on time for whatever reason. So the RBCC will keep its schedule from now on, and in fact to make up for the delay of this issue, #152 will be in your hands in 30 days!

You might notice something odd on page 4. I've changed the name of the RBCC while keeping the same call letters. The magazine long ago outgrew it's name but what could I do? It was a well known and established title. Plus I had become rather immune to the rather juvenile aspects of the title until Harlan mentioned how embarrassing it was for him to tell people this issue was upcoming and then telling them the name of it. The name belied the content. So I finally decided to bring the title up to the times and what better time for a change than the opening of the Eighties? So even though the intent and direction of the magazine will not change one iota, and it'll still be the good 'ol RBCC, the real name, for those to whom that really matters, will be "A Reader's Blend of Creative Commentaries." That may sound a bit pretentious but *you* try matching up appropriate words to those four letters. It wasn't easy.

Just to dispell the beliefs some people hold, Harlan was in no way responsible for the lateness of this issue, and in fact was more than helpful in that he read over every article and interview and corrected information where necessary, as well as providing brand new pieces here and there. Harlan also approved every piece of art and worked with Kerry Gammill and Bret Blevins to insure that their adaptations of his stories maintained the integrity of the original material.

"A Conversation with the Man Who Hates Television" is reprinted from the May/June 1979 issue of the Videophile, which is an excellent magazine (in fact the best) for those of you with video recorders. It has all the latest in market news and analysis of everything even remotely connected with the field. Subscriptions are $14.00 for six issues (one year) from James Lowe, 2003 Apalachee Parkway, Tallahassee, Florida 32301.

This issue includes artwork by some more people who are new to the RBCC. Richard Harrison Green provides four exquisite full page illos from some of Harlan's earlier stories, and Mahlon Fawcett did the centerspread. You can see more of their art through the ads they have in this issue.

As full as this issue is, it could have been even longer but I held back on other material including an article I'm writing for RBCC #152 which will be a detailed report on Harlan's legal victory over Paramount/ABC regarding their misappropriation of his story "Brillo." I attended several days of the trial so it will have added insight beyond cold facts.

I'm extremely proud of this issue of the RBCC as it grew into something even greater than I could have imagined and everyone represented here contributed in some important way, especially Harlan Ellison himself.

RBCC CONTRIBUTORS

HARLAN ELLISON
HARLAN ELLISON
I HAVE NO MOUTH & I MUST SCREAM
THE BEAST THAT SHOUTED LOVE AT THE HEART OF THE WORLD
ENCOUNTER WITH AN ELLISON

Photo by Kim Gottlieb

An Interview With—

HARLAN ELLISON

CONDUCTED BY James Van Hise. With grateful acknowledgements to Marc Wielage.

My own association with Harlan Ellison's writing stretches back only about ten years or so (although my collection of his work goes back considerably further.) Probably the first Ellison story I read was "Rock God" in Creepy #32, and my interest grew from there, not rapidly, but geometrically. Whereas some fans find their interest in a writer or artist waning after a few years, mine grew more intense, and continues to do so. The more of his work I read, the more impressed I became. While discovering more and more of his fiction, I was fortunate enough to have had access to The L.A. Free Press when he was doing his columns "The Glass Teat," and later "The Harlan Ellison Hornbook." The reason my interest in his writing grows stronger is because Harlan, unlike many writers, has never stopped trying to do something different. Whereas some writers typecast themselves into a literary corner which they feel safe and comfortable in, Harlan only feels safe and comfortable when he can do something that he hasn't tried before.

I was talking with Bret Blevins one night during the early stages of Bret's work on the strip "Basilisk," and we began discussing the fact that there is no such thing as a Harlan Ellison "type" of story. Whereas everyone knows what you mean when you refer to a story that is like Lovecraft, like Howard, like Burroughs, or even like Bradbury, it isn't possible to say this about Harlan. How can one say this about a writer who has produced such divergent fare as "The Beast That Shouted Love At The Heart Of The World," "Bleeding Stones," "Basilisk," "Jeffty Is Five," "From A to Z in the Chocolate Alphabet," "The Executioner of the Malformed Children," and "Santa Claus Vs. S.P.I.D.E.R.," just to name a few? But the clincher to all this is that he continues producing stories like this at an uninterrupted pace. One can never be sure what the next new Ellison story will be like. In fact, the only similarity to be found among Ellison's best stories is that in every case they are totally unlike any other story you have probably read, and do not appear to be inspired by the approach or ideas of any other writer.

But unlike many other writers, Harlan made the decision long ago that he would not live behind his stories, so much as he would exist alongside of them. Thus his fans know a great deal about him from the introductions to the stories in many of his collections, as well as by the collections of his non-fiction essays such as THE GLASS TEAT and THE OTHER GLASS TEAT. Harlan believes in speaking his mind and in trying to accomplish something with those opinions. His support of the E.R.A. consisted not just of stating his position in many publications prior to his guest-of-honor appearance at the 1978 World S.F. Convention in Phoenix, Arizona, but also in taking his message to a wider audience with his appearance on "The Tomorrow Show" prior to the con (and which may have contributed to the even larger than average attendance this convention experienced.) Some fans believe that Harlan is always blowing his own horn about his activities, and yet many of Harlan's personal efforts are never written about in or outside the fan press. Probably very few people even know that Harlan went to Utah last November to push for the passage of the E.R.A. in that state wherein the large Mormon population vehemently opposes such action. Not only did the experience exhaust him and cause him to cancel a planned trip to England, but he described the trip as one which made him feel like an agent provocateur in the one state which is perhaps the most unsympathetic to the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Harlan believes in speaking his mind and in calling attention to injustice if he feels that others aren't speaking loudly enough. But on the other hand, he is more than willing to heap praise on those he finds deserving, as evidenced just by his recent introductions to NEW TALES OF THE ARABIAN NIGHTS by Jan Strnad and Richard Corben, and BERNI WRIGHTSON: A LOOK BACK published by Christopher Enterprises. He is happy to praise the praiseworthy, but it is always on his own terms. For this reason, readers know that when Harlan praises something, he is speaking his mind completely on the subject and is holding nothing back. He does not hesitate to say what he likes and dislikes in the clearest and most unmistakable of terms. But some people don't understand this. Some people feel that Harlan can be reined on their own terms, instead of his, and fail to appreciate that his praise, however qualified, is praise nonetheless from a quarter that many people know only for criticisms. To take a for instance. Michael Whelan recently had a collection of his paintings published, and he had originally asked Harlan to write the introduction for it. He asked this not because Harlan's name would look nice on the book jacket, but because Harlan has admired Michael Whelan's art since 1971 and in fact an original by Michael from that long ago hangs proudly on the wall in Harlan's home. When Harlan wrote the introduction, he praised Michael Whelan and his talent, but remarked that some of the paintings in the book were only average, whereas others were very good and that Michael was an artist on his way up. Whelan's ego refused to tolerate what he termed faint and incomplete praise, and he refused to use the introduction. Harlan had to get cranky just to receive payment for a piece which he had written in good faith and with clean hands and composure. Harlan does not stroke egos. He gives praise

where he sees praise is due, but also gives criticism when it is due in order to achieve a perspective on whatever subject he has approached.

I knew of Harlan's willingness to speak his mind on most any subject before I interviewed him, and I tried to do an interview which, although moving back and forth on a central theme of comics, would encompass much more than that as it becomes a foray into his opinions on writing, television, society, and even offers rare glimpses into his childhood. I attempted to cover subjects which had never been covered with him in an interview before (although The Comics Journal, who interviewed him shortly after I did, does overlap in some areas, I could not help this, and it really doesn't matter now since their interview was published first), because previously most interviews with Harlan have almost exclusively focused on science fiction.

This brings us to another point. Harlan Ellison is not a science fiction writer. He is a fantasist, which is a much broader term encompassing a great deal more than the genre of science fiction does. When he announced a few years ago that he was "leaving science fiction," the wails and shrieks from fandom were deafening, and without exception they came from people who not only didn't understand what they themselves were saying, but who didn't understand what Harlan was saying. All Harlan was saying is that he wanted his work judged as something more than the narrow strictures of science fiction would imply that it was in the reading marketplace. He never said that he was going to be writing anything radically different thematically from what he had been producing before, just that he felt his work deserved to be marketed apart from "the giant cockroach and berserk vacuum cleaner books," so that it could be judged on the merits of what he wrote, instead of as the representation of a genre. A similar view has been expressed by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. when he stated, "I have been a soreheaded occupant of a file drawer labeled 'science fiction'...and I would like out, particularly since so many serious critics regularly mistake the drawer for a urinal." I don't think that anyone would say that Kurt Vonnegut was being unreasonable, so why should they feel that Harlan was being unreasonable?

But if Harlan's stands on various issues have made his public life turbulent, his outspokenness has made his private life even more so. Because Harlan refuses to brook the inconvenience to himself and others contiguous with an unlisted phone number, anyone who wants to can attempt to contact him anytime of the day or night, and they often do. Thus his address is no less difficult to come by. He seems to have accepted the fact that he must deal with this drawback which results in frequent invasions on his privacy, and worse. During my first visit to his home he mentioned that it was not unusual for him to receive death threats, and while he casually played a recording of one someone had left on his telephone answering machine, he mentioned several attempts on his life that had been made without the preliminary benefit of a warning. These included people coming openly armed to his front door, and even one attempt to lure him to the offices of the L.A. Free Press where a bomb was exploded. Needless to say, he has always managed to retain the upper hand in these encounters, and he has delivered more than one bound felon to the offices of the Sherman Oaks police.

Some might argue that there is a certain inconsistency involved when someone who values their privacy as highly as Harlan does his, won't even take the same precautions that second rate movie stars and others who are even less in the public eye usually do. Harlan's reply would be that it would be a greater inconvenience to him if those people who had legitimate reasons to contact him found themselves blocked and delayed by his keeping his address and phone number secret. Further, he says sternly, he will not be intimidated. Although this attitude leaves him open to the less harmful by equally annoying invasion of fans asking stupid questions, it is an uncomfortable situation he has had to deal with for a long time. He doesn't like it, and his attitude to fannish letters and phone calls has not mellowed a bit over the years (especially when those letters demand a response.) Mostly it is a situation he endures more than he accepts.

During my visits with Harlan, I have seen most of the sides of him one has experienced from his non-fiction monologues, that being brash, energetic and candid, which some people feel sums Harlan up quite simply, and they are quite simply wrong for thinking this. I had been in Harlan's home just a short while when he inquired if we had ever met before. I replied that we had met briefly three and a half years before at a convention in Boston when I bought two copies of the record he had out then. He immediately asked if he had been civil to me (he had), which struck me as interesting because that's what I would have expected a fan to ask me upon hearing that I had been at Harlan's house. As the evening drew on, Harlan grew more relaxed and gracious, and was not at all the barbed warrior many fans seem to view him as from letters I've read in Starlog, Future, and other sf magazines. Like everyone, Harlan has many facets to him. The public facet seen by most fans is one seen only in quick spurts, and not at prolonged intervals, and even these must be viewed in their entirety in order to draw a more realistic opinion. Seeing a letter from Harlan in Future wherein he defends himself from a mindless attack does not draw as clean a picture of him if you don't see the other letters and non-fiction pieces he has done, such as one in Luna #46 (March 1973) in which Harlan describes the personal loss and agony he felt upon the death of his dog, Ahbhu. The people who have pre-judged Harlan have, by and large, done so on the basis of incomplete evidence. There is far more to Harlan's life and persona than most fans even begin to realize, unless they have read several of his books and a couple hundred of his non-fiction pieces of various kinds.

What I have tried to do with this interview, and with this issue of the RBCC, is show a wider cross-section of Harlan Ellison and his work than can usually be found in one place, and show that not only has he truly earned all of the awards he has received, but he deserves them as well, because his words have enriched us in ways too countless to list here.

* * *

SINCE THE RBCC IS SLANTED MORE TOWARDS COMICS, I'D LIKE TO START THE DISCUSSION THERE. THE EC ADAPTATION OF "MEALTIME" WAS THE SECOND PIECE OF WRITING YOU EVER SOLD. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

Oh, well, that's really no great mystical story. I was in high school at the time, so that would be about 1952. My dad died in '49. We moved from Painesville to Cleveland and I was having a lot of hard times in school because the death of my dad had unhinged me, although I didn't realize it at the time, and I wasn't doing any work. I was doing a lot of writing on my own and I hooked up with a kid named Ray Gibson, who was a marvelous caricaturist and cartoonist. He was doing work for my fanzine, Dimensions, at the time. We did a bunch of things that we submitted around, one of which was a cartoon that we submitted to Bill Hamling at Imagination, and he bought it and published it. That was the first thing. No, it wasn't actually the *first* thing I actually sold ...because I had sold a number of other things to newspapers and such places, but I was always paid off in baseball tickets and, you know, some of that crap they would give to a kid. But this cartoon was the first time that I'd actually gotten money. Ray and I split the check.

Then I thought up the idea for "Mealtime," which E.C. called "Upheaval" when they ran it in the magazine. I submitted the idea to Weird Science Fantasy and I guess Al Feldstein was the editor. I was just sending these things out with no expectation whatsoever of selling anything, and along came back a check. It was wonderful, and the next thing I knew, here was "Upheaval" published with Al Williamson art. Now, I didn't know that Al Williamson was hot stuff in those days, I just thought, boy, that's terrific: I made twenty-five dollars.

Subsequently I wrote the story out at full length and had it published first in the Ohio State humor magazine, The Sundial. It was the first thing I had published in The Sundial. Then I sold it again to Bill

"By the time [Irwin] Allen (who is one of the most lunatic persimmons ever placed on this planet) had it changed, it had gone through 26 rewrites and you could not possibly have recognized it as the original story, 'Mealtime.' But that was the last time I wrote it and sold it. I think five or six times selling the same story is okay."

Hamling at Space Travel, and I got another $25.00. Then the last time I sold it (I don't know if anybody even knows this) it was the basis for the segment of VOYAGE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA that I wrote for Irwin Allen, although it was hideously changed. I put my TV pseudonym, "Cordwainer Bird" on it. By the time Allen (who is one of the most lunatic persimmons ever placed on this planet) had it changed, it had gone through 26 rewrites and you could not possibly have recognized it as the original story, "Mealtime." But that was the last time I wrote it and sold it. I think five or six times selling the same story is okay.

So that's really all there is to tell about selling that story to E.C.

IT SURPRISED ME TO LEARN ABOUT IT BACK IN 1973 WHEN I WAS READING THROUGH THE BIBLIOGRAPHY ON YOU WHICH WAS PUBLISHED THEN. THAT WAS THE TIME WHEN E.C. WAS VERY BIG IN FANDOM WITH ALL SORTS OF ZINES AND ARTICLES BEING PUBLISHED, BUT NONE HAD EVER MENTIONED YOUR WRITING FOR THEM.

I had never met Bill Gaines, but I met him somewhere (we were both speaking on the same bill at some prestigious university seminar) and we wound up spending an evening together.

I said to him, you know, I was one of your early writers for Weird Science Fantasy.

He said, my God, how old were you?

And I said, I don't know, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, something like that. He was amused, and he sent me a copy of the magazine and asked, would I mind signing it, and so I did. He's a charming, charming man.

DID YOU DO ANYTHING ELSE FOR COMICS BETWEEN THEN AND WHEN YOU DID "ROCK GOD" AT WARREN?

Not that I can recall.

The first thing that I did for a comic, oddly enough, was for an early Superman/DC comic called True Fact. I wrote a letter in to them which oddly enough Ed Bryant recently reprinted in some fanzine or other, Thrilling Mind-Boggling Stories Fanzine or other, and he found this old issue of True Fact in which a letter appears from Harlan Ellison saying, "My family and I read your comic book and find it very interesting," which is absolutely true. I thought it was a marvelous comic. That's where I first learned about Dick Bong, the ace of aces, America's leading ace in WWII, who became one of my big idols. I think that was the first thing I had to do with comics, although I had been collecting them since I was a very little kid.

If anybody out there reads this, there are two things I've been looking for for years. I've never been able to find them. I would be most grateful if anybody could come up with them. One of them was a comic called Man O' War comics, which was my big fave when I was a kid. It had a lot of issues, and no one seems to have ever seen it or heard of it or anything. The hero in it was a guy named Man O' War. Just about the only happy Christmas I ever remember was a Christmas spent with that comic book, and I would give quite a lot to get it. The other thing that I've been looking for was a series of Canadian comics that came out in the forties. They were wonderful. There was one western kind, there was one superhero comic, one spy comic, and they were wonderful. I don't remember the names of any of them, or who the characters were, but the thing I do remember is that they issued a series of patches that you could sew on to your jacket that were about three by five, maybe a little smaller, and they glowed in the dark with these comic characters, and there were about eight or ten of them in all. Wonderfully drawn. They were some of the best artwork I can remember from when I was a kid. Of course, when you go back and look at some of this stuff you thought was really terrific, you know, like Bernie Bailey, you go my God, he was awful. Ghastly! It was like stick figure shit.

A sideline anecdote that has nothing to do with anything else. Years later, in the fifties when I was writing for science fiction magazines and I was working for Don Wollheim, they had a guy there who was editing men's magazines and a science fiction magazine, who was Bernie Bailey. Bernard Bailey, the guy who drew the Spectre. I didn't realize who he was until even years after that and I thought, my God, that schlockmeister I always used to go visit was Bernard Bailey who did all those terrible comic book drawings in the earliest days of D.C.

Anyhow, if anybody can find any of those Canadian comics, and I don't even know what the names of them were...I'd recognize them if I ever saw one, I'd pick it up and go *oh wow*. I would love to get my hands on them again.

I believe when I do interviews like this in throwing these things out because there's this group mind out there that will find things for you. One time I mentioned in an introduction to a story how I missed certain things from the past, one of which was authentic old

"I think that for pure self-service, to the exclusion of the betterment of their brothers and sisters, for pure greed, and for pure cowardice, there is no greater bunch of totems in any of the arts that I know of that approaches the cowardice of comic book people."

wooden cigar boxes. They don't make them anymore. They must have sent me five hundred goddamn cigar boxes! I got cigar boxes coming out of the po-po. I got cigar boxes up the gee-gee around here!

I'll tell you something else I need (as long as we're doing this). I need one Big Little Book to complete a set. I don't collect many of them, but the one that I need is "Flash Gordon and the Emperor of Mongo" which is a Dell book, not one of the actual Big Little Books. That's the only one I need and I've been trying to find it for years at a reasonable price, because they charge such exorbitant prices and I ethically don't feel I should pay them. It was slightly larger than a Big Little Book. It was published by Dell rather than Whitman who did the BLB's. I figured I'd just throw that out if anybody's out there reading, they could get in touch with me.

OMIGHOD!!
IT'S A GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST--MY PAST!!
IT'S MAN OF WAR, THE CENTAUR PUBLICATIONS SUPER HERO THAT APPEARED IN TWO ISSUES OF LIBERTY SCOUTS IN 1941 (#2 AND #3) AS WELL AS TWO ISSUES OF HIS OWN COMIC, COVER DATED NOV. 1941 AND JAN. 1942!
AS I RECALL IT HE WAS CREATED BY THE GOD OF WAR, MARS, AND APPEARED AND DISAPPEARED ON EARTH IN EXPLOSIONS!
ONCE THERE, HE USED HIS ABILITY TO FLY AND HIS STRENGTH --EQUAL TO THAT OF HERCULES-- TO FIGHT CRIME AND INJUSTICE
PAUL GUSTAVSON DREW HIS [illegible] IN COLOR YOU COULD SEE THAT HE HAD A RED TOP WITH YELLOW STARS AND AN EAGLE EMBLEM WITH BLUE
BUT WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE??
HEARD YOU WERE LOOKING FOR ME, KID, THAT'S ALL.
DIDN'T WANT TO DISSAPPOINT AN OLD FAN--HAVEN'T GOT MANY LEFT, Y'KNOW...
HARLAN ELLISON
MEETS
MAN of WAR
FRED HEMBECK, 12-80

I'VE HEARD A LOT OF DIFFERENT THINGS ABOUT "ROCK GOD." JUST HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

Well, I'm almost reluctant to talk about "Rock God." Jim Warren is a person whom I have disliked for a great many years. It did not start out that way. We were on very friendly terms. In fact, he introduced me to my second wife, Billie, who had been a friend of his in years past.

The whole thing with "Rock God" was that I was in New York, I guess, and he'd gotten in this Frazetta painting, and I looked at it and I thought, gee, that's a great painting, boy I'd love to write a story around it. Well, Warren conned me and said, okay, I'll pay you "x" amount of money (it was a nice piece of change) and we'll get whoever you want for the artist, and I said Neal Adams. He said, we'll get Neal Adams. He said, on top of that, we will push all of your books in the back of Eerie or Creepy or wherever the hell he was going to publish it, and I knew that he was selling a lot of books through those ads, that a lot of kids were getting turned on to stuff. That was the chief reason why I did it. To get my books seen in that market. I think that was around the time when New American Library was bringing out new editions of ELLISON WONDERLAND, APPROACHING OBLIVION and THE BEAST THAT SHOUTED LOVE AT THE HEART OF THE WORLD. I wanted to get them shown and seen around. Well, also I was supposed to get the original artwork. I was supposed to buy it from Neal. Neal and I had talked about it, and he said fine, no problem. But Warren kept it. He wouldn't give it back to Neal. Warren didn't have any right to it, but he kept it. He's always said, *well, I have the rights to this artwork. They sold all rights to me, blah, blah, blah.* There's been that controversy going for a long time, and I think it's one of the most meretricious policies. It's malignant in the industry for them to hang on to original artwork (the magazine publishers, that is).

I think that for pure self-service, to the exclusion of the betterment of their brothers and sisters, for pure greed, and for pure cowardice, there is no greater bunch of totems in any of the arts that I know of that approaches the cowardice of comic book people. The conditions under which most of them work are no better than sweat-shops. The hours they work. The prices for which they work. The way they are held in bondage (there are only two markets, really, and they play one against the other). It's shocking. Then I read all of this bleeding and crying and pissing and moaning in

"Once you get a little power. Once you get a little clout. Once you get a little strength, you then become responsible to everybody else... You do for those who can't do for themselves, or you do for those who *want* to do for themselves, but need a little more power. I think that's the obligation of the strong, to assist the weak."

The Comics Journal and The Comic Reader about Gerber gets booted out of here, and Len Wein Gets booted out of there. They're fuckin' kicked around and treated like shit, and when they try to start an organization (Neal and a few of the others tried to really bulldog them into doing it), the old fuckers didn't want to be bothered. You know, we get our twenty-six a page or thirty-two a page, or whatever the fuck it is they get, and the young people don't have any clout. They run around like chickens with their heads cut off, anyhow. As a consequence, they're like whole congeries of European duchies fighting among themselves for land that is being raped by robber barons. I just wonder how long it's going to be before people in comics band together and stand up on their hind legs and say *NO MORE, we're just not going to have this happen any longer.*

I HEARD, REGARDING THE ORGANIZATION THAT NEAL ADAMS TRIED TO FORM, THAT OUT OF ABOUT TWO HUNDRED PEOPLE WORKING IN EVERY LEVEL OF COMICS PRODUCTION, THAT ONLY ABOUT THIRTY ACTUALLY CAME FORWARD AND SAID THEY'D STAND WITH HIM.

That's absolutely right.

Take Gerry Conway. I've known Gerry Conway for many years. We're acquaintences. Not the best of friends, but we know each other. I can't say I much care for what Gerry writes. I think Gerry's kind of comic book writing is really inferior and I'm sorry to see that because he's a man who has demonstrated considerable talent on occasion. But Gerry I know. If tomorrow there was a strike, Gerry would keep on working. I

"I would sooner sell my horse and cart before I'd work again for Jim Warren. I mean, there's no amount of money the man could offer me. In fact, they offered me money to *buy* 'A Boy and His Dog,' and I said no, absolutely not. I told my agent that I don't care if he offers me eight million dollars."

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just know that. Gerry's like guys in a lot of industries; they look out for number one, and number one means big house, keeping his wife happy, two cars in the garage, and gettin' into movies. I think that is shameful.

Once you get a little power. Once you get a little clout. Once you get a little strength, you then become responsible to everybody else. At that point, you don't sit back safe and fat and happy and say, *well I've got mine, Jack, I'm all right.* You do for those who can't do for themselves, or you do for those who want to do for themselves, but need a little more power. I think that's the obligation of the strong, to assist the weak. Not leaners, you understand; not people who are babies and crying and aren't willing to make a sacrifice in their own behalf, who aren't willing to give up something and who aren't willing to fight down to the last breath. But for those people who are. Those people who have determination and courage, and simply need a little more clout and a little more hand, I think it's absolutely *de rigueur* for someone with those credentials to assist them.

Gerry is, for better or worse, a powerful kind of person these days. He's doing so much work that he's valuable to DC, and he could be doing these things, but he doesn't. But I don't mean to single out Gerry; he just comes to mind as one among many. This has been going on for so goddamn long now. It's almost like talking about people who go back and build their homes over an earthquake fault. You wonder why they keep doing it, why they don't fight back. I guess it's like why did so many Jews walk into ovens. Well, they were beaten down by that point. They had their spirits broken, and they were tired. Maybe that's it. What I find bemusing are all the articles that appear subsequently by people who were too stupid to band together in the first place, who got booted out when they crossed somebody the wrong way, and they're saying: You know, I'm actually a great artist, but my work was destroyed. I think bellyaching after the fact is foolishness. You must fight people from the front. From the git go.

Was that the sermon? That may have been the sermon.

I HEARD A STORY INVOLVING "ROCK GOD" AND WARREN THAT SAID THAT YOU HAD DINED OUT WITH JIM WARREN, AND WHEN HE SENT YOU THE CHECK IN PAYMENT FOR THE STORY, HE HAD DOCKED YOU FOR YOUR PORTION OF THE MEAL.

Yeah, he deducted it from the money he paid me for the story. He's a chintsy, cheesy little man. He's a very little, little man, and he loves to play big entrepreneur. He screwed Will Eisner. He screwed

Corben. He screwed everybody of talent. You know, if he ever played straight with people, he could be very highly thought of and a reputable publisher, but he's not. He's a schlockmeister. He's always been a schlockmeister. That's the kind of mentality he has. He's the kind of guy who always looks for the angle. He always looks to screw you. Then after he screws you and you complain about it, he finds five hundred things you did wrong that he muddies the water with.

There was a party at a convention where I did a series of drawings with Bill Rotsler, "The Kong Papers." We were coming through the lobby with them and he saw them. It was a lark for Bill and me. We were going to reproduce sets and sell them. Warren saw these and goes, I want to publish these, I want to publish these, I want to publish these, I'll give you "x" amount of dollars, blah, blah, blah.

I said we'll see about it, Jim. I would sooner sell my horse and cart before I'd work again for Jim Warren. I mean, there's no amount of money the man could offer me. In fact, they offered me money to buy "A Boy And His Dog," and I said no, absolutely not. I told my agent that I don't care if he offers me eight million dollars. He cannot have the story. So Warren went ahead and he told a writer to adapt it and to use a different name on it. Well, that isn't quite what happened. I don't want to get into the whole thing because the writer involved is a good guy and didn't know what was going down. But when he found out what was going down, he got in touch with me, and Warren blacklisted him for awhile. So I told the guy, c'mon out here, you'll live here, in my house, and I'll make you a star. He came to L.A., and he lived here for oh, four, five, six months, and he's now writing television and movies. I got him in at Filmation, and he has since done very very well for himself. He's living out here and he's very happy.

You see, I think courage should not only not be punished, I think it should be rewarded. It shouldn't be that the writer got docked and lost his job. I mean not only that, but he should come out better than he was to begin with. which, of course, he has. He's not living back east where he was poor. He's here now. He's making money. He's not rich yet, but he's making money, and if he keeps plugging at it, he's a good writer, he'll make money, he'll get on, and one day he'll be very secure, in fact happy and all because he did something courageous. He pointed out to me that they were trying to rip me off.

It's very strange when I think back on all the various involvements I've had with comic books and comic book people. Denny O'Neil is one of my best friends. I wouldn't know how to live in a world that Denny O'Neil wasn't in. He's just one of the really important people in my life. I see him maybe once a year, twice a year, when he'll come out here and do some teevee, or I'll go back there. He'll be working and come to the hotel and we'll have a steak together and sit and rap and that's about it. But knowing that Denny is there is very important to me.

Len Wein. And Marv Wolfman a little less because I don't know Marv that well. I know Len a little bit better. But Len, I just enjoy the times I spend with Len so much. He was just out here with Marv and he brought Dave Cockrum along, and what a splendid fellow he is. Just a charming man to be around.

Bill Stout has become a good friend.

Will Eisner and I are pretty tight since I worked on the Spirit, you know. We've gotten together a number of times when he comes out here.

Comics have just sort of infiltrated my whole life all the way through. I mean what's sitting here on my desk that I'm working on right now is for Heavy Metal. It's for the reprint of "Santa Claus Vs. S.P.I.D.E.R." at Christmas time using the original Gahan Wilson cover from Fantasy And Science Fiction. They're a comic book, of a kind. And last night I had dinner with my French publishers who are Humanoid Associates in France. They're the ones who do Metal Hurlant. I'm now, they tell me, a *cause célèbre* in France. I've got the front page on Le Monde, for Christ's sake. They gave me a huge review saying I'm taken very very seriously, and that all comes as a result of Humanoid Associates publishing all of my books over there now in French. They've done three of them already with more coming out before the end of the year, and they've got a lifetime contract with me for everything I write and I'm treated very seriously. I'm going over there in October to do publicity and promotion for the books. They're now producing a play based on one of my stories. They want to do "The Human Operators," the story I did with Van Vogt. All kinds of things are going on in France as a result of comic books. It's serendipity. It's an endless cycle that began years and years and years ago. Comic books were always a large part of what formed my existence because my life was so dreadful that I had to retreat into fantasy worlds. One of those fantasy worlds was the one

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papered from wall to wall and floor to ceiling with comic books.

I remember one time...you know, you remember happy moments from your childhood, and I didn't have all that many. They used to send me to summer camp (just to get rid of me...they didn't want me the fuck around, I guess) and one year they sent me to a place called Bellefair, and what it really was, was an orphanage. It was a Jewish orphanage, and during the summer the kids were sent away somewhere else, and to keep the place running they would take in summer campers. They sent me there, and I knew it was an orphanage. It was not like a summer camp, it was really terrible, and they made me wash the floors like Little Orphan Annie. I remember that. I used to wash the floors with a bucket and Fels Naptha soap and a big wooden brush, and I'd get down on my hands and knees. There were a lot of stairs in that place. It wasn't even a summer camp-looking place, it was a big cinderblock building. It was a terrible place...and I ran away. I was always running away from summer camps, constantly running away, because I was miserable. I was a little kid. I couldn't win at any of the games. I was unhappy. I was lonely. For me, a heavenly summer would be to lie under a tree and read a book. But of course, you know little kids in the forties. *You've gotta' go out and be a man, you've gotta' go be a man, you've gotta' go play baseball, and swim, and make a lanyard.* I didn't know how to do that. I was as inept as hell, and they always came out looking like shit, and that was my crafts. I would do a three-legged stool. I didn't intend to make a three-legged stool, I intended to make a scale model of the Queen Mary, but it would turn out to be a three-legged stool. I hated it so. I just hated it. I hated it when they sent me to them. I begged them, *Christ, don't send me to anymore summer camps. Leave me alone. Just let me lie here under this tree.* But they'd say, no, no, you're going to summer camp, I guess because they wanted to get away from me for a couple months.

Anyhow, they sent me to summer camp and I went over the wall. Literally, *over the wall!* There was this huge stone fuckin' wall, man, and I took my bedsheet, and a couple other people's bedsheets, and tied them together, and I tied a rock to the other end. A huge

"The Wind Beyond the Mountains"

rock. I weighed like nineteen pounds. I was the smallest kid in the history of the universe. And I threw the rock over the wall, and it either wound in a bush or a tree or something like that, and I pulled myself up and climbed over the wall, and ran the fuck away! Off I went. I was always running away, even before I really ran away at the age of thirteen. So I must've been maybe ten or eleven years old then. I was a little kid. And I walked and walked and walked on into the next day, through that night, freezing cold, and into the next day. It was wonderful. It reads like an old comic, like something out of "Gasoline Alley." The next day I had not eaten, and with no money, of course, and I'm walking along the street and I was by this time in Cleveland somewhere, but in one of the suburbs, god knows where. But I was walking along, and I can remember it as if it were yesterday. On my right was a huge stand of trees and woods which went down into a little dip which you couldn't see into; it was all dark with a little stream running through it, and I was on the street, and on the other side were some houses. I'm walking along and I suddenly see, lying in the middle of the sidewalk, with its cover up, facing me as if it had just been left there by God, or whoever's in charge...the current issue of All-American Comics. And I remember it as if it were yesterday. There was Doiby Dickles, Green Lantern and the lamp, and he was charging his ring at the lamp, and it was a brand new issue as if it had fallen out of somebody's shopping bag or something, or some kid had dropped it. I picked it up and I thought, any moment, someone's gonna' come out of the bushes and grab it away from me. A gag, like when they put a string on the end of a wallet and drag it away from you when you go for it, but nobody did. It was mine! *It was mine!* I must have walked for three more hours reading that comic, just as happy...one of the happiest moments of my life! I remember it just as if it was yesterday, and that must have been, Christ, the early forties, 1942 or '43, something like that. I remember that very clearly. How dull. How winsome and wistful. If the audience could hear this, you see, if the readers could hear this, the catch in the throat. The artful lack of precision. It's a wonderful thing.

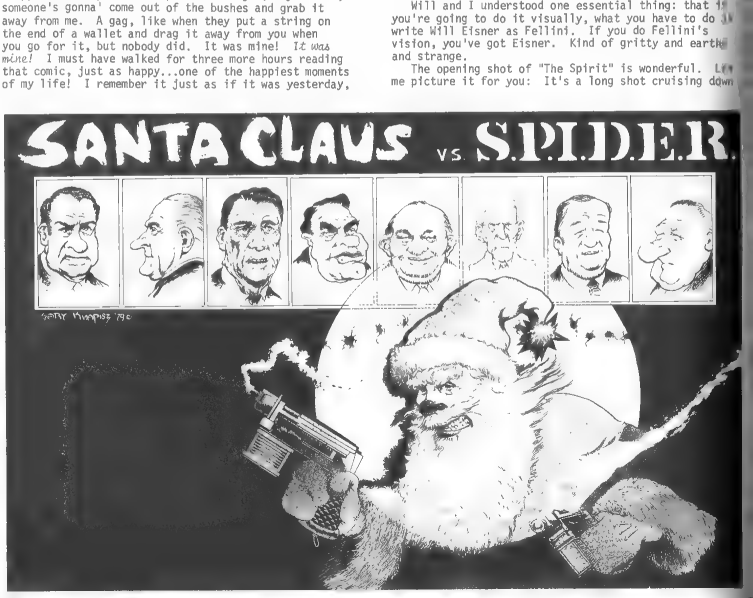
TO REFER BACK TO SOMETHING YOU MENTIONED IN PASSING EARLIER, I'D LIKE TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR SCRIPT FOR THE ANNOUNCED, BUT NEVER PRODUCED, "SPIRIT" MOVIE. IS THAT EVER GOING TO BE MADE?

I did it for Billy Friedkin, but Friedkin rejected... well, he didn't even reject it...I don't know. He got pissed at me about something else, and he let this project die. But I don't think he ever would have done it anyhow. He's the kind of man who puts together nine thousand things and does two. His greed is bigger than his stomach or something...his eyes.

Will Eisner has, I guess, gotten the rights back and is trying to move it around. I tried to move it with Chuck Fries productions (they're the ones who do Spider-Man). I think it's a natural, just an absolute natural for television. But now, of course, I don't do television. I won't do television, so I suppose my version of it is dead. It's a nice little treatment because it's all full of Eisner drawings. I went back to all my old Spirit comics and I Xeroxed different panels and clipped them in such a way that there was no dialogue. When I needed, say, a hand with a gun coming out from a door...of course there's always a shot of a hand with a gun. So the whole treatment is full of Eisner drawings.

Will and I understood one essential thing: that if you're going to do it visually, what you have to do is write Will Eisner as Fellini. If you do Fellini's vision, you've got Eisner. Kind of gritty and earthy and strange.

The opening shot of "The Spirit" is wonderful. Let me picture it for you: It's a long shot cruising down



length of a river toward a bridge, like the
klyn bridge, in the dead of night. There's a mist
across the river. You know, that wonderful Will
ner mist that hangs low on the water. The camera
rks to rise and goes up toward the bridge when you
inly see a light on the bridge, and it's someone
oking up a match. You can see it through the fog.
Camera comes in on it, not too close, though, and
ee two men standing and talking. One hands the
er a sheaf of papers. The guy who was smoking the
arette reads the papers then suddenly tears them into
ds and throws them off the bridge. He then lifts

was the smallest kid in the history of the universe."

guy and throws him over the bridge, and the camera,
ch is high, starts coming down. It follows the body
ll the body hits the water, and then it holds as the
er floats down and as the paper floats down it forms
words *The Spirit*. Then, as the camera comes down
the water, the guy has thrown his cigarette over
r the body, and the cigarette hits the water and
es psshhh, and you cut to black. That's the opening
, and it's pure Eisner. It's pure visualization of
Eisner technique, which is incredibly visual. Will
r is a director; is a cinematic writer. No ques-
about it. All these other guys who pretend to do
haven't the vaguest idea. I mean, you take a look
page of Eisner, and that's camerawork, man! The
has got an incredible eye, even today.
t whether it'll ever be done, the answer to that
stion is...I don't know.

*ONLY ARTIST I'VE SEEN WHO SEEMS TO HAVE PICKED UP
HAT KIND OF CINEMATIC VISUALIZATION (ALTHOUGH HIS
OW IS DIFFERENT AS WELL) IS RICHARD CORBEN.*
hat's true. Rich does that sometimes. I don't
k it as very Eisner-esque, but it is that same kind
thing.
Steranko did that kind of thing for awhile.
eranko was very heavily into doing that kind of thing
hile. Whether he was knowingly learning from
Will had done or not I don't know, but Jim went
into magic realism and surrealism in his stuff.
a very talented man also. I have a lot of respect
Jim's work. Also, personality-wise, he's very much
e me. Mean and tough.
id you know that I wrote to Jeanette Kahn asking
to take the gun ads out of DC comics? It finally
curred to me that one of the places that kids learn
l guns from a very early point in their life is
e books. Plus, I had seen an ad...it wasn't a
ly ad, it was that other gun company that showed an

apple being split, shattered by a bee-bee. And I thought, Jesus Christ, a kid sees that and it could be a head just as easily; another kid's head. I wrote her and I said, Jeanette, this is really none of my business, I suppose, but since I am in the Ban the Guns Coalition, to ban handguns, I really think that the time has come for people in the comics industry to be responsible and stop to think about the nature of the ads they run. If you want to see, you know, *Sea Monkeys*, and Kool Aid, and Twinkies and crap like that, that's I suppose all right, although Twinkies are not particularly good for anybody. But to hype kids and get them ready to join the National Rifle Association, and teach them from an early age that guns are a good thing, that guns make you a he-man, and that guns are what every good boy should have, I think is pretty evil. She wrote me back a letter saying that she'd take a look at it, and she'd look into it and that I'd raised a valid point, and there were no gun ads for about three months. I thought, Jesus Christ, I had been a Force For Good in Our Time. Then they started up again. I suppose they just, you know...

SHE WAS PROBABLY OVER-RULED BY SOMEONE ELSE.

I'm sure. Somebody at Warner Communications said, gee, we were getting "x" amount of dollars from these people since the *year two*. Why are we not getting this money anymore?

Why aren't they out looking for other sources of advertising? Why are they not? Why do they persist in doing ads which are clearly bad for kids? You would think that the decade of the sixties, and the decade of the seventies would have had some impact.

"Comic books morally and ethically speaking are still the same place they were in 1939. That's so tragic."

Comic books, morally and ethically speaking, are still the same place they were in 1939. That's so tragic. And when the only answer to them are underground comix, which are clearly *bugfuck*, non-linear, adolescent and immature, filled with flopping nipples and engorged penises, and people with swords (and no offense intended to Rocket's Blast), it's all so goddamn adolescent! And yet, there are constant paeans of praise, of self-praise, to the skies about how mature we all are, and the new era in comics, and this new maturity and that new maturity. Christ, the last maturity I saw was in the sixties when Denny and some of the other guys were doing things of moment.

Swamp Thing. You know how much I admire Swamp Thing. It's really a high watermark in comics, as far as I'm

concerned. Not just because of the brilliance of Berni Wrightson's art. Not just because of the incredible craftsmanship of Len Wein's plots. But because there was a subtext. They understood they were dealing with mythic forces; with the whole golem myth. With the whole ugly human syndrome. The whole alienated persona sensibility. It was a wonderful thing to see happen, and it just blossomed out of nowhere and was breath-taking to behold.

Conan, in the original, in the early days, was so exciting! It's nothing, now. It's just nothing to see.

I look at all this old, weary garbage, you know, where they think if they cross-pollinate a villain from another strip, that they're doing something strange and radical.

Take the JLA/JSA crossovers back in the sixties. Each year everybody looked forward to them! It was really a high old time. You'd say, oh boy, only two more months, man. It's gonna' happen!

Now it's, Jesus Christ, crazy Conway and his...I mean, he seems to want to shove every character, up to and including Krazy Kat and the Yellow Kid in, just to see if he can get in two more than he did the year before. The stories are banal. They are empty. They are impossible. They are improbable. They're just wearisome and boring.

This interview is just gonna' go over terrifically. Is there anybody I haven't assaulted? And they'll say, *oh, it's just Ellison assaulting, and he's just doing his thing.*

I wish to God I could be happy about comics.

DO YOU THINK THAT THE WEARINESS IN COMICS IS BECAUSE OF THE WAY THE COMPANIES TREAT THE PEOPLE WHO WORK FOR THEM? COULD IT BE THAT THE PEOPLE WHO COULD BRING THE DEPTH AND THE IMAGINATION ARE PERHAPS THERE, BUT THEY'RE NOT BEING ENCOURAGED, ARE ARE JUST TOLD TO LEAVE THINGS THE WAY THEY ARE?

I think that both of those suggestions are correct.

Look, one of the reasons television is as dreary as it is, is that the people with genuine imagination refuse to be brutalized. They'll do it for a certain time in the beginning of their career, or when a certain project seems interesting to them, or when someone gulls them into coming back to the fold temporarily; a Paddy Chayefsky, Reginald Rose, Tommy Gries (who is now dead, who was a wonderful director). A lot of guys and a lot of women whose names you don't know because very few people know the names of television writers. These are people of rare imagination, wit and talent. They're some of the finest playwrights this country has ever produced, and they have fled. They have literally fled and said *no more, no more, you're not gonna' treat me like a piece of shit, I'm not gonna' have it. I care too much about myself and I value my work too much.* And they would not put up with it, so they flee, turning over those endless hours of television that have to be programmed. I mean, they don't care what they have to put on. They could put on, you know, rectal suppository ads for ten hours, and they wouldn't care what it was. People would sit and watch it anyhow. And so the good people desert because it's not a fight that they choose to fight. It's not a fight that any of us give a shit about winning or losing. People say, well how can you desert teevee, shouldn't you be changing it? No, I should be destroying it, which is what I want to do. I want television to go away and not be there at all, of any kind. I hate television. It's bad for people. Read the introduction to STRANGE WINE. I'm firmly convinced that it's evil, and it wouldn't matter what they were programming. People would sit and watch it, stuffing their faces with pepperoni pizza and ice cream and Twinkies and Coors beer and they would sit there and watch it until their brains turn to absolute puree of bat shit! So I don't want to be involved. But people say, shouldn't you be bettering it? And they keep saying that even after I said what I just said. They'll say, yeah, but if you were there it would make it better. And I said, you don't understand. I don't want better stuff on, because if you put better stuff on more people will watch and they'll get polluted worse. At least with the boring garbage, a few people do drift away every year, and every time I write something like that I get a letter from a fifteen year old saying: *I a fifteen year old and you said that we don't read, that we don't do anything, but I want you to know that I don't watch 6.5 hours of television,* which is what the TV Guide this week said the average American watches. 6.5 hours of television a day. 6.5 a day! It's gone up from whatever it was. Anyhow, there'll always be like six letters from smartasses who lie. You know they sit and watch the tube, too. They just say, *I am an intellectual teenager. I sit and read nothing but Dostoevski all day!* It constantly amazes me how when someone makes a statement like that, that television is bad for you, someone always judges the greater from the

"This interview is just gonna go over terrifically. Is there anybody I haven't assaulted? And they'll say, *Oh, it's just Ellison assaulting, and he's just doing his thing.* I wish to God I could be happy about comics."

lesser. They take themselves as examples. They say *well I don't. I only watch 2.3 hours a day, so this guy must be wrong.* And then they write me a letter saying, *you're wrong, teevee is okay because I only, because I go out skating, and I do this, and I do that, I work for the Red Cross, and I carry cats out of burning buildings.* They do all this bullshit and suggest that this invalidates what you've said. But it doesn't. All it does is prove the point because of the rare exceptions. There are fewer and fewer people reading today. Clearly. Obviously. Statistics prove it, and historically what we're doing is we're programming ourselves right into an illiterate no-no land. It's going to be crazier and crazier in this country as the years go by and it shows up in every kind of way. I mean, there would be no fast food chains serving all this garbage food.

All across this nation are kids, little kids, who really don't know that there's anything better than a MacDonald's hamburger. To them, being taken to a MacDonald's stand is heaven!

JUST LIKE IN THE COMMERCIALS.

Exactly!

THEY'RE NOT AN EXAGGERATION.

It's nature imitating art. They are taught that this is the thing to do to have a good time. *Mommy, mommy, take me to MacDonald's for dinner tonight. Nobody does it, like MacDonald's can.* I got news for you. My mother, who was the world's worst cook, bar none I want you to understand, I'm telling you that right now, the Borgias were better cooks than my mother. My mother's cooking was so bad that pygmies came from Africa to dip their darts. My mother could do it better than MacDonald's could, and my mother's dead and she can still do it better than MacDonald's can. But here is something this is pushed and hyped to kids twenty-four hours a day.

Fast food chains. Cheap goods. Lack of craftsmanship. Lack of ethics. All of these things are promulgated by teevee. You want to buy a trailer home. *Buy this trailer home, it's only twenty-two thousand dollars. Wonderful payments, $201.00 a month. Deferred payment, forty-four thousand dollars.* You're paying an extra twenty-two thousand dollars in interest. Now that's just fucking robbery! No one bothers to read it because the printing is on very fast, and nobody can read anyhow so what the hell does it matter? There's supposed to be fair trade laws to protect the consumer. But you're dealing with slope-browed, prognathous-jawed imbeciles sitting at home, bleary-eyed, watching some old movie or some talk show, and inbetween are flashed twenty-five "Buy-a-trailer-home" commercials, and they got ya' with the price. *Well I can afford that. Can't we afford that Joe-Bob? Sure, we can afford that.* Except that it's forty-four thousand dollars, is what it is. They pay for the rest of their lives; literally, for the rest of their lives; and all of this is permitted. They still have advertising for sugar cereals for kids on Saturday morning. They talk about violence, and have no bloody idea what they want. NFL is the biggest thing in the world, and there's violence pure and simple, and that's known as the American ideal.

Television embodies and encapsulates everything that is loathesome, decadent, crazed and monstrous in American society. It is the worst of American society for the past three hundred years all just slugged down and presented with wonderful glossy phospher-dot images and the best people have left, simply because they won't be a part of it. They will not be brutalized. They will not see their work crippled. They will not go through the harrassment and the maniacal craziness

"There are fewer and fewer people reading today. Clearly. Obviously. Statistics prove it, and historically what we're doing is we're programming ourselves right into an illiterate no-no land. It's going to be crazier and crazier in this country as the years go by and it shows up in every kind of way."

that you have to go through to get something on the air.

And art by committee. Schmucks who were in the garment industry five years ago, or two years ago; jerks who were in the mail room six months ago suddenly telling you how to write a story. *Well, our character wouldn't do that.* What do you mean, our character wouldn't do that? Human beings will do anything. No, it has to be consistent. It has to be absolutely heavened out and bland otherwise they can't have it. And so the best people have left.

I think the same thing works in comics. The best people have gone away. First of all, because the amount of work that is laid on this is too great. The deadlines are too fast. The quality of the work that is required of them is not nearly high enough. They are not challenged. The writing, I think, is abominable, abysmal, semi-literate, artsy-craftsy pompous sententious garbage. I can't believe the writing! It wouldn't be permitted in the cheapest paperback. Purple prose! This Weirdworld stuff. Oh my god! The reading of that is like reading the worst of Tolkien, which God knows is bad enough.

Just so nobody's under any misapprehension, I am up to my ASS, friends, in fuzzy-footed pointy-eared little creatures. I don't want to see no more of them. I don't give a fuck about them. I would like to see a human being in a comic book who has a problem that I can identify with instead of the search for the power gems, and the lost realm of Nyrlathotep or wherever. Jesus God! Mindless garbage!

SO AS FAR AS WHAT TELEVISION IS DOING, YOU THINK WHAT WE NEED IS PERHAPS WHAT RAY BRADBURY TALKED ABOUT IN "ALMOST THE END OF THE WORLD" WHEREIN ALL OF THE TELEVISIONS SUDDENLY CEASE FUNCTIONING, AND PEOPLE HAVE TO START LOOKING TO EACH OTHER.

What a frightening moment for them.

"Television embodies, and encapsulates, everything that is loathesome, decadent, crazed and monstrous in American society."

Do you know (and this has happened) they could burn every book in the library in a town, and no one would say a word. Well, a few of the teachers might say a word, and a few intellectual assholes, you know, a few of the commie pinko thinkers would probably complain. But for the most part, the people in the town would not give a damn. But take away their teevee for one day, and they will march on the city hall with shotguns and pitchforks. I mean, look how many people objected because they had programming of the last moonwalk instead of the soap operas. The soap operas were pre-empted and people were calling and writing and saying, *how dare you take away our soap operas for this crap.* Right? Walking on the moon is crap. And that's the point. We have steadily bastardized the taste of this nation over the last forty-fifty years to a point now where they cannot accept strong red meat. They ain't got the teeth for it no more. All they can do is gum a little "Starsky and Hutch." They can kind of run their moist tongues over "Three's Company" and "Laverne and Shirley." Everything is blanding out this way. It's turning into a nation of cowards, which is why a putz like Richard Nixon could get away with what he got away with for so goddamn long, because people are stupid and they don't know any better. That's what television does. It keeps you so goddamn stupid that you accept everything on faith. You accept that MacDonald's is good for you. You accept that Kentucky Colonel chicken is dynamite.

Have you ever noticed this? Whenever you're in the area of a Kentucky Colonel, the smell of chicken is all over the place? You know why? You know that cupola they've got on the top? It's got huge blowers in it to blow the smell of that rancid fuckin' chicken all over the neighborhood so that when you're coming home saying, oh, I don't want to cook tonight...ah, chicken! There's a good idea, chicken! I'm glad I thought of that, right? The kids coming home from school smell that chicken. *Mommy, mommy, can we have the Colonel tonight?* Yes sir! We're gonna' have the Colonel. We're gonna' rip a few of his arms and legs off, and you can have the beard; we're gonna' eat the old fucker. Yes, we're gonna' have the Colonel tonight!

It's mass madness! We're being systematically driven into the ground! Bad taste becomes the order of the day, and people who object to it, schmucks like me, are suddenly spoilsports. I must be complaining because I'm sour grapes. Bullshit sour grapes. I make over

two hundred thousand dollars a year. I live like a fucking king! I indulge myself, man. I go to England and I walk through the Tate Gallery. I go to Paris and I go to the Louvre. I'm able to buy a fine painting by someone if I want. I'm able to buy a Gene Colan original if I want, because I think Gene Colan's good and I like his work and I'd buy one by him just the same as I would a Picasso. They're not on the same level, but there's worth in both. People don't do that. You go in an office and what do they have? They got pictures painted on black velvet of little kids with huge eyes; of horses with white manes streaming out behind them running across a landscape. They think that's art! They think heavyweight art is to go on the Queen Mary tour.

I'm becoming more and more, the older I get, an elitist, and I do it out of a matter of survival. I don't want to be friends with the masses. The masses are the ones who form lynch mobs. I don't like them. They are stupid. I don't like stupid, he said, stupidly.

THE LAST TIME YOU WORKED FOR COMICS WAS WHEN YOU WROTE SOME CONTINUITIES FOR MARVEL. DID YOU FOLLOW THROUGH ON THOSE OR DID YOU JUST WRITE THEM AND SEND THEM IN?

I just wrote them and gave them to Roy, and I guess Roy did the stories for them, and the actual layouts.

I've been working on a Batman story for Julius Schwartz for five, six, seven, ten years, whatever the hell it is. I promised it to him and I'm gonna' do it before he retires. Are you out there, Julie? Somebody take this and point it out to Julie. Julie, I'm doing it.

It's about a race riot in Chicago, and I'm really very high on it. It's called "Nightmare In Black."

DID YOU START THIS BEFORE RICHARD DALY DIED, AND DOES THAT CHANGE ANYTHING IN IT?

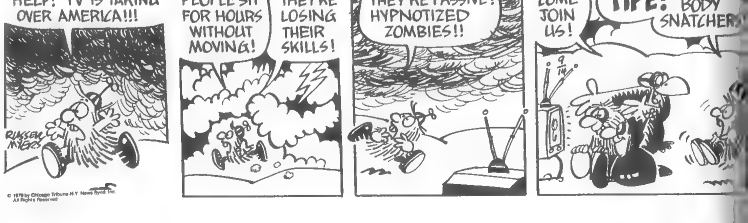
Yeah, I did start it long before Daly died. It's based on a race riot that I was in, in Chicago, at Rainbow Beach. I'm giving it the perfect kind of setting, and the perfect kind of story for the Batman and I think it's a way of doing (and this is a terrible word to use because that was during the sixties, the relevant period, right? Now everybody got away from relevant and it's space monsters again), a story that has some contemporary impact and a moral and ethical message for comic book readers that does not get preachy, and does not depart from being entertainment.

You see, I don't object to things being entertainment. The pity of it all is that the word "entertainment" has come to be so debased today that only things that can be entertaining are crap like ROCKY II and STAR WARS (which is godawful beyond belief; awful, dumb, stupid, pointless crapola), something that's mindless. So the word "entertainment" has become synonymous with empty, mindless, don't think, escape. And to me, Kafka is entertaining. To me, Melville is entertaining. To me, "Little Nemo" is incredibly entertaining! I just won't go for that okeydoke that to be entertaining, something has to be Neil Simon or various other emptinesses of that nature. The "Tonight Show" is "entertaining," because the emptier it is, the more entertaining it is. I don't think that's a yardstick. I think they lie to us and tell us that only empty entertainment like that is good for people. That people want to do away. They want to escape. There's escape, and there's escape. You can escape into intellectual thought. You can escape into ethical enrichment. There's all kinds of escapes that better and beautify your life. That make you a more worthy person. This kind of stuff steals from you. You are less having sat and watched teevee for six and a half hours. You are less after reading a Gerry Conway comic book. You are less after reading a Harold Robbins' novel. You are diminished, as opposed to being an enriched person after having seen, perhaps, "I Claudius," or read a comic by Denny O'Neil or Will Eisner (God knows). I feel a very strong obligation in these areas. I think everyone who considers himself an artist should. And I think anyone who considers himself only a commercial hack should get the fuck out of the business and go become a good bricklayer. The world has need of good bricklayers. There's no room in the world for commercial hacks whose only plus in the ledger is that they get things in on time. I find that reprehensible and offensive in the extreme.

ISN'T THAT ATTITUDE MOSTLY ENCOURAGED BY THE PEOPLE THEY WORK FOR?

Of course. They don't want you to be good. They

BROOM HILDA



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want you to be on time. That's what they do in teevee, too. They say, *I don't want it good, I want it Thursday. Ha, ha, ha, ha.* Which is one of the reasons why I'm considered one of the unhireables. I don't give a shit for their deadlines. I once had a producer say to me (while crying! He was crying! The dumb sonofabitch was crying!), *I've gotta' have the script, I've gotta' have the script, where is the script?* It was "The Flying Nun," and are you ready for that, I did a "Flying Nun," because I thought it would be fun to do a comedy (and I also wanted to get next to Sally Field), and so I did this "Flying Nun", and this was before it ever went on the air. I saw the pilot and I liked it. I thought it was kind of funny. I didn't know it was gonna' turn into such a strange series. But Sally Field was even good in those days. Nonetheless, I was laid up in the hospital. I'd been in a bad street fight in Milford, Pennsylvania. My hands were all bandaged up and I was lying in the damn bed typing with my thumbs. This was years ago, and William Sackheim, who was the producer (better known as Weeping Willy Sackheim) called me and started bleeding and screaming that he wasn't gonna' be able to put it up on the board and get it cost-accounted if I didn't get it in on time. I said, Billy, really stop to think. I mean, let's deal pragmatically with the universe. Let's forget, for a moment, that the business, that show biz, is so important. I said, let's say I don't get the script in to you by next Tuesday, which means that you can't get it cost-accounted by a week from next Tuesday, which means that they cannot hire a director by three weeks from Tuesday, which means that one month from this Tuesday they won't have it on the soundstage, which means that they won't have it into editing and dubbing by two months from this time, and that means that sometime in September on a Tuesday night it won't be ready, which means that sometime in September, you know, on a Tuesday night, people will turn on their teevee sets and they'll be greeted with a half hour of recorded organ music. I said, this will in no way set back the course of Western Civilization.

He couldn't understand it; couldn't understand it. He could not grasp the concept that it did not matter that a lousy half-hour teevee series not go on. So maybe the advertiser would take back his money and NBC wouldn't make eight million megabucks that year.

There is reality, and there is reality. There is the reality we wish to believe. There is the reality perceived by other people that they wish to believe. And there is reality as it really is. The pragmatic truth of the matter is that if every goddamn show on television were blown away like summer chaff, it would not matter in the least! But the removal of one Shakespeare sonnet from this world, would kill us. That's reality. That's the truth.

There's a quote over here from Faulkner, that I have over my typewriter. It says: "If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate. The Ode on a Grecian Urn is worth any number of old ladies." I firmly believe that.

I am foursquare for Art. I am foursquare for artists fucking over the Establishment, stealing money from publishers, from television studios, from film producers; taking as much as they can, not even turning in the work, running away to Peru. Anything they want to do, man. Screw 'em any possible way they can. They are the peddlers of commerce. On my typewriter is a phrase that says, "I am an artist and should be exempt from shit." You know who said that? P.J. Proby. You remember P.J. Proby? He was one of the few intellectual rock musicians. He died.

Okay, what else do you want to know?

I WANT TO TALK ABOUT SOME OF THE PROJECTS WHICH WERE ANNOUNCED, IN SOME CASES YEARS AGO, BUT WHICH NEVER APPEARED. A FEW YEARS AGO I READ THAT YOU WERE WORKING ON A SEQUEL TO "A BOY AND HIS DOG" INVOLVING A GIRL NAMED SPIKE?

Yes. Well, you know the prequel has been published?

YES, I READ THAT IN ARIEL.

The sequel was written as a two hour script for television. It was supposed to be on NBC. They were going to do "A Boy And His Dog" series. It's about

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"We're being systematically driven into the ground! Bad taste becomes the order of the day, and people who object to it, schmucks like me, are suddenly spoilsports."

Spike. It's that whole thing. It's called "Blood's A Rover." I will be getting around to doing that as a story, as a novella, a very long novella, about twenty, twenty-five thousand words sometime this coming year. The people at Ariel want to do a book, an illustrated book around it. I may let them do that, I don't know. I wasn't too happy with the adaptation they did of "Along The Scenic Route" which Al Williamson drew. There were technical things in it, things important to the logic of the story, which were done completely wrong.

I may let the people at Galileo publish the script. Who knows? All of these things may happen.

EVEN LONGER AGO I READ THAT YOU WERE GOING TO DO A NOVELIZATION OF "DEMON WITH A GLASS HAND." THERE WAS A CHAPTER OF IT PUBLISHED IN A CONVENTION BOOK ONCE?

Yes, yes it was. The beginning section, which will be redone because that was years ago and I wouldn't use that now. Yes, that's true. That will be written, too. All this stuff will be written. I go at my own

BROOM HILDA

THERE HE IS!
LEAVE ME ALONE! YOU'RE ALL TV PEOPLE!
COME WATCH WITH US, NERWIN! IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL, SO SOOTHING...
NO! NO!
HOLD HIS HANDS!
SEE THE NICE PICTURES? SO PRETTY, SO PLEASANT!
YES, I SEE... SO PRETTY, SO PLEASANT!
HE'LL BE ONE OF US SOON!
RUSSELL MYERS

pace. I just do what I do what I do.

People keep asking me, *when am I gonna' see, when am I gonna' see*, and my response to them is always the same as Michelangelo's to the Pope when he asked him when the ceiling was going to be finished.

WHEN IT'S FINISHED.

When it's finished! If they don't like it, they can go and read somebody else.

The wonderful thing about being whoever it is that I am, and whatever it is I do, is that I have a corner on the market. They have to come to me to get Harlan Ellison Stories. They can't go anywhere else. They can get imitative versions. There are a lot of punks around who are imitating what I do, and that's fine, let 'em try, because by the time they're imitating what I have done, I somewhere else already because I never go the same place twice. You can't hit a moving target. That's the quickest way to get imitated. Frazetta is always complaining about all the people who are imitating him; Boris, Ken Kelly, and all the rest of these people who are stealing from him, you know? And I, on the one hand, feel compassion for the man because he is in fact being ripped off by all these cheesy imitators who haven't got the art or the wit to have their own style and they think there's something honorable in emulating an artist's whole sensibility. But on the other hand, I say to myself, well Frazetta, if you didn't do the same goddamn thing every time. If you weren't always in the same place. If you weren't an immobile target, they wouldn't be able to hit ya', baby. You don't find anybody imitating Picasso, because every time you looked for the sucker, he wasn't there no more, he was someplace else doing somethi[ng] else, always fresh and new and innovative. That's what I try to do. I try to stay ahead of it. I n[ever] write the same story twice. People are always sayi[ng] *why don't you write a story like...or why don't you do another one of, or, gee, I liked and it would be nice*, and I say piss on you, and I write something [com]pletely fresh and new and different that wins all [the] awards, and then they come and say, *gee, why don't you write another one like that one*, you know? It's like television and movie producers. They don't know what they like until you give it to them, and then they suddenly realize that that was what they liked.

All you have to do is think of it first. It's an easy life.

SOME THINGS WHICH HAVEN'T APPEARED DON'T HAVE TO DO WITH THAT, LIKE PYRAMID'S SUSPENDED SERIES OF YOUR BOOKS.

They didn't suspend it, I stopped sending the bo[oks] in. I wouldn't give them the rest of the books.

Those books are all coming out from Ace Books in paperback. The first eleven plus I HAVE NO MOUTH A[ND] MUST SCREAM in a new edition, and another nine or t[en] books beyond that. There'll be about thirty of the[m] in all.

ARE THESE BOOKS THAT ARE FINISHED, OR BOOKS THAT WIL[L] BE NEW?

Some are finished. There's a new book sitting r[ight] there to your left. See that stack of white papers? And there's another one down there that is all finis[hed] I got new books all over the place here. I do my t[hing]

Artwork copyright 1969 by Jim Steranko. Reprinted by permission of the artist.

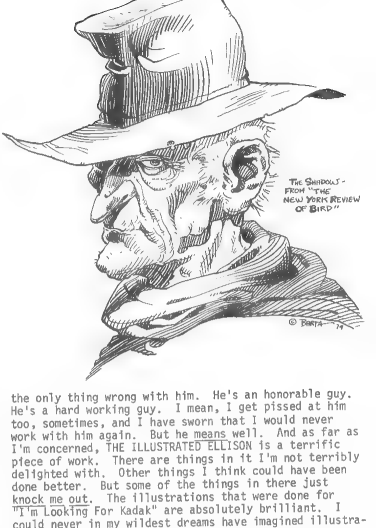
books a year, sometimes three books a year. That's enough. I mean, I'm going to live to be a ripe old mean age.

WAS THE SITUATION WITH "THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BIRD" IN WEIRD HEROES AND BYRON PREISS CENSORSHIP, OR WAS THAT SOMETHING ELSE WHICH CASED THINGS TO BE EDITED OUT?

Well, the attorneys for Pyramid said that they would be sued. My agreement with Byron originally, and always has been, that nobody fucks with my words. If you buy what I write, you buy what I write. If you can't square your conscience or your legal problems with publishing what I've written, then don't buy me! I mean, I don't wreak anyone's arm to publish my work. But Byron got me, and himself, into one of those situations where, I guess, they were already on press with it and they had to make the changes, and so I was a good guy. I said, okay, and I let them make the changes. I put those things back in for its appearance in STRANGE WINE. I put all those things back in with the exception of one name that I was assured by the party that I would be sued, so I made an anagram of the name, and that's fine.

But now that you bring up Byron. I've had a number of dealings with Byron. On THE ILLUSTRATED HARLAN ELLISON, and on WEIRD HEROES, and I must tell you that I read magazines like The Comics Journal and places like that, and they're always taking off after Byron Preiss. They're always trying to kill him! Even when he does a fairly competent piece of work like Delany's EMPIRE, they run a whole big article by Chip Delany saying how much he hated it, and how this was changed, and how that was changed. I make no bones for Byron in that area. Byron does compromise sometimes, because Byron gets himself into binds with publishers and printers and artists and writers and his own artistic sensibility, and he tries to satisfy everybody. Instead of thinking ahead, he has no...The only problem with Byron is not that he is weak or cowardly or untalented or insensitive. None of those, because he is the opposite of all of those. He is a very bright young man who, I think, has really and genuinely tried to expand the horizons of the comic form, and he has in a number of ways. A lot of the things he's done, other people are doing, imitating, and they may be doing them better than Byron, but Byron had to be there first to do them otherwise they wouldn't have been done. He is an easy target because he seems to be an entrepreneur, and in some ways he is that. But entrepreneurs can be good, like Mike Todd, or bad like Richard Nixon. They can hype and promote something that is worthy or something that is meretricious and destructive. Byron is a very easy target because he doesn't have an overall sense of artistic ethic. For me, life is very easy. I don't have to think about it. If I turn around the corner, and I see a falling down drunk, I go and I help him. I don't have to worry that my clothes are gonna' get dirty and puke all over my shoes, because I know that's going to happen. My sensibility. My way of living is, there's certain things you do, and you go and you do them. Byron doesn't have an integrated philosophy of art or life or courage in that way. I suppose it's because he's young. So as a consequence he goes with the moment. If a problem arises, he tries to make-do the best he can. He tries to satisfy everybody, and that's like the British in their policy with Israel. The reason that we have the Arab-Israeli confrontations today is because of England and all of the craziness when England had it as a protectorate. They didn't do what had to be done, bite the bullet, and do the unpopular thing at the time; they tried to satisfy everybody. You know, the White Paper and all that kind of game. They gave some of this to him, and some of this to them, and it never worked out, and we're reaping the horrors of that now.

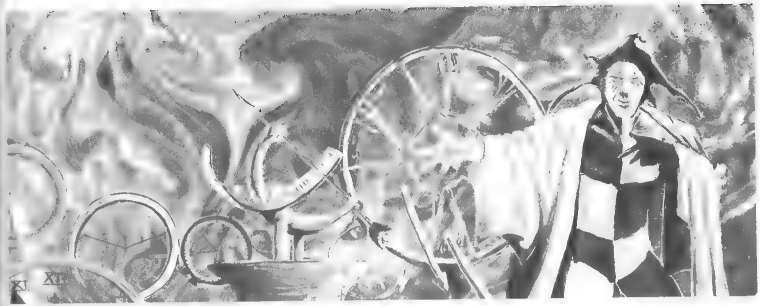
The same for Byron. He inevitably reaps the horrors of his own lack of integrated sensibility, and that's



the only thing wrong with him. He's an honorable guy. He's a hard working guy. I mean, I get pissed at him too, sometimes, and I have sworn that I would never work with him again. But he means well. And as far as I'm concerned, THE ILLUSTRATED ELLISON is a terrific piece of work. There are things in it I'm not terribly delighted with. Other things I think could have been done better. But some of the things in there just knock me out. The illustrations that were done for "I'm Looking For Kadak" are absolutely brilliant. I could never in my wildest dreams have imagined illustrations that good. I want to buy the originals. Overton Loyd, I think, is an absolute, absolute blessing from God to this Earth. He's marvelous. The drawings are funny, and informed, and hip and lovely. I think the "Deeper Than The Darkness" drawings are wonderful, elegant things. I think Steranko's work is very, very edifying. Marvelously inventive. The whole Dillon gallery that they ran is lovely. Michael Whelan's cover on the soft cover is just, just beautiful. Absolutely a stunning piece of work. The two Don Punchatz plates that he did for the hardcover. I've got the originals downstairs. You take a look at those. They will blow you out of the water. They are just gorgeous. I think a lot of the stuff in the book is absolutely wonderful, and I for one am delighted to have had it published. I'm very proud to have that book on my shelf. Whatever Chip Delany's reservations about Byron may be, whatever anybody else's might be on THE STARS MY DESTINATION, or any of the WEIRD HEROES stuff, or the SCHLOMO RAVEN or the CHANDLER, any of the things Byron has been involved with, I think you have to credit the man for having the guts, the chutzpah, the stamina, the stick-to-it-iveness to have gone ahead and done all these things, and to have flown in the face of what could not have been very commercially a sure bet.

And having said that...zzzzzzzzzzzzzzz.

IN VARIOUS INTRODUCTIONS IN THE DANGEROUS VISIONS ANTHOLOGIES, YOU'LL BE TALKING AND WILL MENTION A STORY AND YOU'LL SAY, "OH, ASK ME ABOUT THAT SOMETIME WHEN WE'RE TOGETHER. IT WOULD TAKE TOO LONG TO TELL HERE." ONE SPECIFICALLY WHICH COMES TO MIND WAS THAT YOU MENTIONED THERE WERE TWO DIFFERENT TIMES WHEN YOU WERE WITH RAY BRADBURY WHEN WONDERFUL THINGS HAPPENED.



'Repent, Harlequin!' Said the Ticktockman"

Did I say wonderful?

I BELIEVE THAT WAS THE WORD YOU USED.

I don't think that's the word.

IT WAS IN AGAIN DANGEROUS VISIONS.

Well, let's actually find the book. I said...oh yeah, I guess I did.

Uh, I said I was going to go into detail about those two swell times I had with Bradbury. One of them at a newsstand on Cuhuenga and Hollywood Boulevards, the other an afternoon we spent on the same podium with Frank Herbert where the spark-gap was leapt and seven hundred California English teachers wept and laughed and gave us a standing ovation and for one of the rare moments in my life I truly believed down to the gut core of myself that it was the noblest thing in the world to be a writer.

Yes, I can tell you those two stories. [Cackles.]

The one about the newsstand was this one. If I remember...well, I had not known Ray very well. I'd been out here for awhile and I'd known Ray for a number of years, but we were not very close at that time. We hadn't gotten together the way we have since. I was at a newsstand at Cuhuenga and Hollywood Boulevards and I could not be seen from inside the shop (it's an open air kind of thing where the cash register is and I was standing behind the guy paying for something) and Ray Bradbury was inside. He didn't know I was there at all. Somebody was saying something to Ray about, gee, what should I buy to read? And Ray Burdbury suddenly said, "Oh, you've gotta' buy this kid Ellison. His stuff is really so great! He's really terrific." And he went on and on at great length, and I just sort of stood there and beamed, because it was very nice to have that happen.

The other time was when we were out at Disneyland. At the convention hotel there, in Anaheim, we were speaking to a convention of California English teachers; Ray and myself and Frank Herbert. We were all on the platform at the same time, and we all started talking about our childhoods, and it was wonderful. It was one of the best afternoons I've ever had. We all talked about childhood grudges and who we wanted to get even with. I came up with an idea for a story, and it was such a good idea for a story that on the platform, we all three said, wow, what a good idea! So the race was on and it turned out that I wrote it first and it was "The Diagnosis of Dr. D'arqueAngel," which is in STRANGE WINE. Frank never would have gotten around to it because it wasn't his kind of story, although he liked the idea. Ray dropped me a note saying, "You fink, you wrote it first." But Ray wrote his about wanting to murder this childhood playmate of his, because the guy had never come up to his window in the dead of night and thrown stones against it and said, "Psst, come out! Come out and play!"

It's a wonderful little story and that's the kind of thing that Ray and I think about a lot, I suppose.

I've also been with Ray when a couple of unhappy and ugly things went down, but who hasn't when they are with friends?

MARCUS MENTIONED EARLIER THAT SOMEONE SHOULD WRITE YOUR BIOGRAPHY BECAUSE, REALLY, YOU'VE DONE A LOT MORE THAN MOST PEOPLE DO IN THEIR LIVES. YOU'VE LIVED THINGS AND BEEN PLACES THAT HAVE BEEN TURNING POINTS IN VARIOUS KINDS OF HISTORICAL MOVEMENTS. YOU'RE ARTICULATE, AND YOU'VE SEEN AND DONE THINGS WHICH ARE MEANINGFUL AND FASCINATING.

Well, I've been doing it myself. I've been writing articles. There are a lot of things like the march from Selma to Montgomery that I did with Martin Luther King, Jr. I wrote a piece about that called "From Alabama With Hate." I wrote it years ago. It's in the files here, and one of these days we'll do a book called THE HARLAN ELLISON HORNBOOK, which has got a lot of this kind of stuff, and it'll have a lot of things. It'll

"I'm becoming more and more, the older I get, an elitist, and I do it out of a matter of survival."

have the time that Steve McQueen saved me from sunstroke and dying on the desert and carried me two and a half miles on his back. I have a picture from that over here. You didn't know that either, did you?

THAT'S JUST IT. THERE'S A LOT OF THESE THINGS, BECAUSE SOMEONE ELSE WHO KNOWS YOU WILL MENTION THEM IN PASSING IN HALF A SENTENCE. I'LL GET TO A COUPLE OF THOSE THINGS IN A MOMENT.

ONE THING I WANTED TO ASK YOU ABOUT THAT I'VE NEVER SEEN DESCRIBED ANYWHERE IS THE "DARK FORCES."

Yeah, well. There's a cover for the book right over there.

"THE SALAMANDER ENCHANTMENT"?

Yeah. It's a terrible cover. It's way back there. They're not going to use it.

"Dark Forces" is a wonderful script that's the basis of the first novel, THE SALAMANDER ENCHANTMENT. It's a fantasy series about a Dr. Strange-like magician, a sorceror. It's your classic story about the guy who almost dies. Almost gets killed, and is on the other side for a brief moment and sees that there is another side, and comes back. He's a famous attorney. An F. Lee Bailey type. And he can no longer justify the things he's been doing. He wants to get involved. He starts going into the occult and doing the whole thing. He goes to Tibet and he finds an old man in a cave sitting there floating in mid-air, freezing weather and all that. Then he comes back. Then begins a story about him. His name is Kraiter, and it's a wonderful idea for a series of books, and the first one would be based on the script I wrote. I'll do it one day. I'll do it. It'll never be a teevee series. They'd rather do some half-assed version of Dr. Strange than something like this.

THAT DR. STRANGE FILM WAS A SHAME.

Yeah, it really was awful. It was <u>really awful</u>.

IT COULD HAVE BEEN SO GREAT. THEY WATER DOWN EVERYTHING WHEN THEY PUT IT ON TEEVEE. THE IMAGINATION WAS ALMOST ENTIRELY BLED DRY FROM THE CONCEPT.

The guy who did it is the guy who's supposed to be doing CHILDHOOD'S END. It's the same guy, and I don't want to say anything against him except that he doesn't know his ass from his elbow.

MARCUS WAS LOOKING THROUGH YOUR SCRIPTS, AT THE OLD NETWORK COMMENTS, AND HE WAS ASTOUNDED AT THINKS LIKE, A CHARACTER WOULD SAY, "YOU WANT A STICK OF WRIGLEY'S GUM?," AND THE NETWORK WOULD SAY, "PLEASE DELETE THE REFERENCE TO THIS BRAND NAME."

I one time got a network standards and progress report. I got a notice, and at one point some guy in

"I've been in and out of a lot of jails. Civil rights marches. Anti-war protests. A lot of crap like that. Spent a lot of time in coolers. It's not one of my favorite pastimes."

the script is saying, "You're nuts! You're crazy! You're crazy, you're nuts!" The network said, *you must delete all references to crazy or nuts. It is offensive.* I called them and I said, to whom is it offensive? Nuts in a madhouse, maybe? They said, *those who are in homes for the fruity or whatever would find this offensive.* I said, so what, they can't get out. They don't even give them crayons to write letters.

IN THE INTRODUCTION THAT ROBERT SILVERBERG WROTE TO YOUR BIBLIOGRAPHY BACK IN 1973, HE JUST, IN A SHOTGUN EFFECT, TOSSED OUT LITTLE SCRAPS, LIKE, "I WASN'T HERE FOR THIS STORY," BUT ONE OF THEM HE MENTIONS IS THAT YOU PUNCHED JOHN W. CAMPBELL?

"The wonderful thing about being whoever it is that I am, and whatever it is I do, is that I have a corner on the market."

I <u>never punched</u>, I <u>hit</u> John W. Campbell. There's a big difference. There's a very big difference.

See, when I was starting to write professionally in New York, I couldn't sell for shit. I couldn't sell anybody anything. I was going through some very hard and bad times. Bob lived in a room in the same building I did. An inexpensive kind of room, and I kept thinking that I had sold to a lot of different markets. I would send stories out and they would say, oh, we love it, and it's ninety per cent sold, and I would live in fantasy and assume that I had sold it, and I would say to Bob, "Well, I hit such and such a magazine with a story today," and the phrase 'hit' means sell.

At one point I thought I had sold a story to John W. Campbell, and I came in and said to Bob, "Well, I <u>hit</u> Campbell today!" And Bob went into cardiac arrest and said, "You <u>hit</u> John Campbell?" I said, "Yes sir, I hit him today, boy." And it took us about five minutes to straighten it out.

No, I never punched John Campbell. I <u>hit</u> John Campbell. As it turned out I didn't even <u>hit</u> John Campbell on that occasion. I didn't <u>hit</u> John Campbell until years later, with a story, that is.

You see, all can be explained in this life. All you need to know is...Silverberg plays word games, as do I.

ANOTHER ONE THAT SILVERBERG SAID WHICH DEFINITELY WAS <u>PUNCHED</u>, AND NOT <u>HIT</u>, WAS THAT YOU WENT TO JAIL FOR <u>PUNCHING</u> A COP IN A RIOT IN CENTURY CITY.

That's true. Ah...yes, that's true. You want to know about that?

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT, THAT'S OKAY.

No, it's no big deal.

LBJ came to give a speech at Century Plaza, and I and hundreds of other people turned out. It was the famous Century City riot, and the cops had instructions to waste us, and they did. I was covering it for Time magazine; myself and Jimmy Baldwin. He was in one area outside, and then inside, with a press card. I was up along the, pardon the expression, grassy knoll, with a hurricane fence behind us. This was before they had built the ABC Center. I was standing there with a lot of other people who were absolutely and perfectly innocent. Housewives and doctors and office clerks who had come out of buildings to see what was going on, and we were standing there minding our own business. I had a little tape recorder, recording my impressions of what that whole panoply looked like. It was a huge, huge crowd, when suddenly a line of world famous L.A.P.D. blue-pocket fuzz came toward us on their motorcycles and suddenly turned into the crowd, followed by riot troops with truncheons and batons and they pushed us into the hurricane fence, and there was no place to go. No one was doing anything. No one even had a placard. No one was even protesting. This group was totally apart from the protest. And right next to me a cop with a plastic helmet and a visor had one of these big... how far am I holding my hands apart?

ABOUT TWO AND A HALF FEET OR SO.

About a two and a half, three foot long truncheon (the riot clubs they used) and he had it laid against the belly of a pregnant woman who was right beside me, and he was bouncing her off the hurricane fence with this truncheon across her stomach, and I said to him, "Hey, stop, what the hell are you doing?" And he wouldn't stop, so I punched him, and I put my fist right through his plastic visor. Wiped him out, down he went, and two of his buddies jumped me, knocked me to the ground with the truncheons, and while one of them held my arm, the other one jammed his booted foot into the angle of my shoulder and my arm, and broke my arm. Just bent it and cracked it and broke it. I still have tendonitis in this arm to this day.

DID YOU PRESS CHARGES?

Oh, they schlepped me away, threw me in the wagon, and hauled me off. I was in jail with four or five hundred other people, and my attorney had a lot of clout downtown and just got me out of there.

I said, "I don't want to get out, I want to go to trial. I'm one of the few articulate ones for Christ's sake! I want to go to trial."

He wouldn't let it be, and they lost the record of my arrest. I mean, he made sure it was pulled. It was lost on purpose, because I've got a police record anyhow (nothing anybody could use against me. It was years ago, nevertheless). I've been in and out of a lot of jails. Civil rights marches. Anti-war protests. A lot of crap like that. Spent a lot of time in coolers. It's not one of my favorite pasttimes.

Anyhow, I wanted to press charges. But my attorney said, "Don't be ridiculous. This is a railroad job, man. Just stay the fuck out of it."

That's the same thing that kept me out of being part of the Chicago Seven. I was one of the ones who was left behind. Two of us were left. Paul Krassner was the other one. They wanted us loose to be able to keep writing about it. I almost wound up in the slammer with Abbie Hoffman and the rest of them.

Ohhhh fascinating history, fascinating history. I look back on all the shit that I've done, and all the places I've been, and I can't believe it, man. I get tired just thinking about all the places I've been, and all the things that I've done.

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Currently, Harlan is completing the novel version of "A Boy and His Dog" for Ace Books. The sixty to seventy thousand word book will be titled BLOOD'S A ROVER and will include the previously published "Eggsucker" and "A Boy and His Dog," as well as two new pieces, "Run Spot Run" and "Blood's A Rover."

He recently completed a 22,300 word novella, "All the Lies That Are My Life," which he notes is the "longest stretch of writing I've done in about a dozen years."

The day I was at Harlan's for the photo session in February, Harlan was writing the above mentioned story (to a unique musical accompaniment) and he mentioned that one of the attorneys for his corporation, Kenny Gross, was a character in the story. In fact, while the story was in progress, he'd call Gross to read what he'd written thus far. That novella will be the heart of his new collection, SHATTERDAY, which will appear from Houghton Mifflin on November 21st, 1980. It will also appear in an abridged version in The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction as the cover story. The cover, by artist Kent Bash, shows Harlan sitting on Stonehenge. The full novella, with introduction by Robert Silverberg and Afterwards by Thomas Disch, Vonda N. McIntyre, Robert Sheckley, Philip Jose' Farmer, Edward W. Bryant and Norman Spinrad (and 10 astonishing drawings by Bash) will be published in a limited edition hardcover book for collectors by Underwood/Miller Publishers in September or October.

The 105,000 word collection, SHATTERDAY ("my biggest book in some time"), also includes sixteen previously uncollected stories, such as: "Jeffty is Five," "All the Birds Come Home to Roost," "Count the Clock that Tells the Time," "Django," "How's the Night Life on Cassiida?" and "In the Fourth Year of the War."

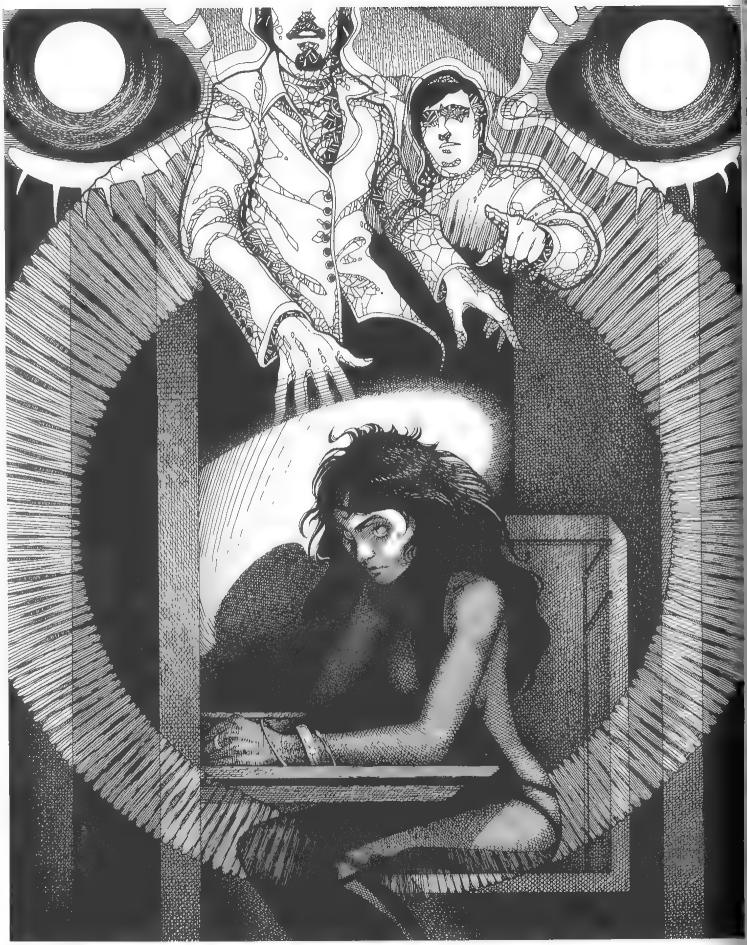
"How's the Night Life on Cassiida?" has also been optioned by Heavy Metal for their full length animated film. Says Harlan, "There's only one artist who could really, really do it and do it well, and that's a man named Overton Loyd."

Harlan has also signed a contract with Ace Books which will include more volumes along the lines of THE ILLUSTRATED HARLAN ELLISON (Baronet, 1979). In particular, Ace wants Harlan to expand his short story "Soldier" into a 40,000 word novella.

His long-awaited THE LAST DANGEROUS VISIONS has been completed, he notes, "and will be going in shortly" to Berkley/Putnam for late 1981 publication.

"Other things in the works," he adds, "are such things as the comic of The Shadow I'm doing with Mike Kaluta, called 'Dragonshadows,' for Fantagraphics; also the MEDEA: HARLAN'S WORLD book for Bantam is finished and includes a story by Robert Silverberg, back from his retirement."

* * *



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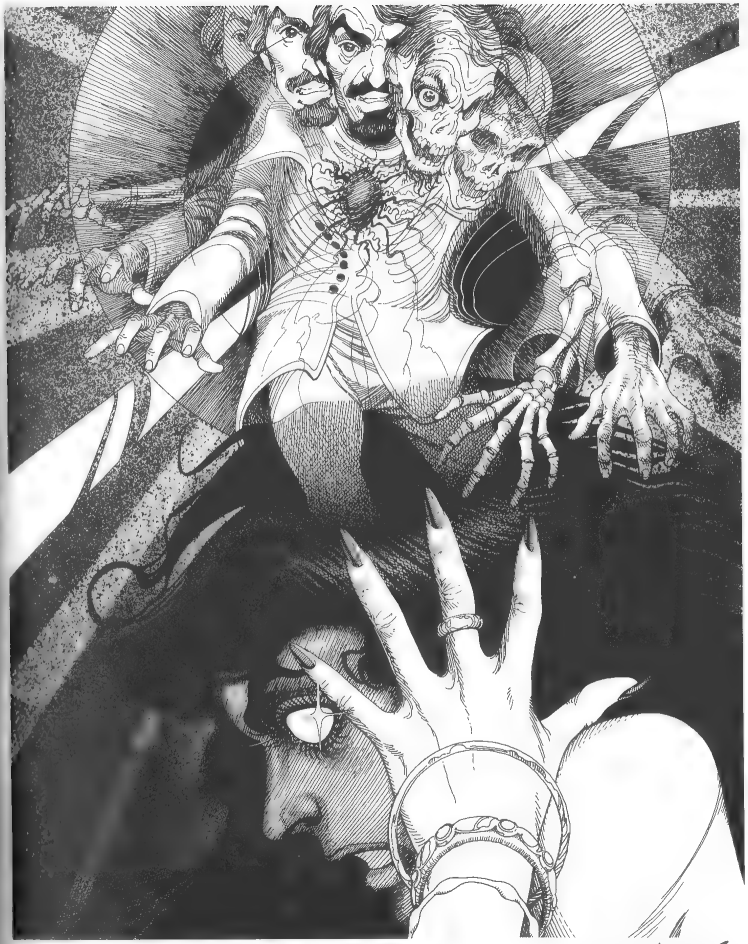
Mark Hempel


Marc Hempel

THE HARLAN ELLISON HORNBOOK

INSTALLMENT □

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"Nowhere are we commanded to forgive our friends," said Cosimo De Medici (1389-1464). Today I'd like to dwell with morbid attention on friendship.

It occurs to me that this column has evolved in some ways into a debunking platform, from which I cynically shoot holes in the balloons of motherhood, Christmas cheer, New Years' resolutions, childhood memories... all the ratholes of the soul into which we crawl to avoid ugly realities. I don't mean it to be that. I never intended it that way. But oddly enough, I find others who shamefacedly admit that, yes, they had always believed in their darkest cores that the things I've written were so. And I suppose confronting these truths can't be a bad thing; the human animal has a virtually limitless capacity for rationalization, an uncanny talent for ignoring lessons learned. So these little candles lit in the darkness don't do any lasting damage, and if they codify universal feelings... well...then I suppose the job was worth doing.

I say all this upfront because what I'm about to venture on the subject of friendship is depressing as hell, but--at least to me--inescapable.

Most of the people we call "friends" are merely passersby in our lives; acquaintances with whom for a short time we have something in common. A mutual club membership, a commonly shared lust, a project, a cause, a crusade, an accident of blood relationship, a physical closeness of habitation...

Yet *friendship* seems to me something else again. Something far nobler, vastly more enriching and warming, something almost succoring. It's there, whether you need it or not, whether you ever make a call on it or not, even if you don't want it. There is a guy I know (and it's going to be hard in this column not to name names, though I'll try my best), and I am his friend. He loathes me. Wants nothing to do with me. Would punch me out if I offered friendship. But I am his friend. He ain't mine, but I am his. I would do anything for him. He did me a good turn once, and I put such a high value on that favor that forever I am on call for him. Times have passed and we no longer talk; he thinks he has a gripe against me--and he may be correct in that belief--but I'm *still* his friend. That's the way it is with me.

It defies reason or common sense, even good sense. But I am a creature who lives by rules and ethics and moralities I've honed and winnowed and pruned through the years till they suit me, so I can do no other. It fills me with sadness that he is no longer my friend; for him I was merely an acquaintance.

Friends are those into whose souls you've looked, and therein glimpsed a oneness with yourself. They are a part of you, and you a part of them. They own a piece of you.

And when it goes sour, it makes you want to go blind.

I'll tell you about one of those in a moment, but first I want to talk about what it feels like when you're in the middle of losing a friend. Having been through four divorces I can tell you the situations are not at all dissimilar.

What is it that makes a friendship go sour?

For me, it's the realization, usually after many small disappointments, that the person in whom I've placed my trust and camaraderie, is not the person I thought him or her to be at all. Usually it's in the area of ethics. None of us are as clean as we would have the world believe. We cheat a little, fudge a little, lie a little, cut a few corners, and occasionally even do something that fills us with self-loathing and guilt. Most of the time we lose very little sleep over the minor gouges we rip in the flesh of honesty; it's too busy a world, and we move so fast we've skimmed past the moment of recognition in which we face ourselves and understand that we've sold out our souls. But our friends see. And though they may not comment on it, because they are our friends, it diminishes them because it means they have put their faith and trust in some creature less grand than they at first imagined. It makes our friends less, and we can only steal from them for so long before they turn away. It has gone sour.

I feel this most acutely at the moment, because I'm in the process of losing one of my closest friends. A fellow writer, I've known him for ten years and have felt more brotherly toward him than almost anyone I've ever known. I am short on family; most of my relatives are clowns I wouldn't associate with if they weren't related, so I see no reason why accidents of blood should bind me to human beings who, but for their familial relationships, are detestables or bores; my friends are my family; I never had a brother; so this friend means a great deal to me.

But over the years I've seen his attitude toward me sicken and turn ugly. He feels a sense of competition in writing, in career success, in notoriety, in women, even in the day-to-day minutiae of conversation. If I say night, he says day. If I say good, he says bad. If I say fried rice, he says steamed. We have reached a point where we avoid each other's company, because

we cannot talk. I cannot blame him entirely; I am by nature a competitive animal, even when I'm relaxed and unaware of the pressure I'm applying. But I've recognized it and now--for a long time now--have laid back when in his company. I don't want that kind of scene with him. But in some special part of his heart, he hates me. He loves me, as well; but that worm of hatred gives him no rest.

But that's only part of it. That's the part that has soured him against me...even though he refuses to admit it, and we still dance the friendship dance with one another: a hideous rigadoon of spastic movements and terrible lies. The part that has soured me against him is in the area of ethics. He is a back-stabber and a weaseler and a guy who will rationalize himself into some very ugly situations.

I remember one time, a few years ago, when I met a girl who was interested in me, and I (at first) in her. She was throwing a party the night I met her, but I had a previous appointment and couldn't go. She knew the name of this other writer, my friend, and I suggested he might like to attend the party. She told me to invite him. There were to be many unattached ladies present.

So I called my buddy and told him, and *en passant*, with a laugh, suggested he hustle any other fine female he saw, but to kinda sorta leave that lady because I wanted to get it on with her myself. So he went to the party.

Guess which one he balled that night?

Out of an apartment filled with females he'd never met before, and with whom he could have swung without contretemps, guess which one he beelined?

That wasn't the first time I had my moment of doubt about my friend's fidelity, but it was a bit of a shocker. I'm not even dealing with the silliness of my "staking out" the woman--she was a free agent and could have a scene with whomever she wanted, of course. Nobody owns anybody. What I'm crawling toward is that *he sought her out specially.*

To what end, I must ask. To the end of chopping me, comes the answer. Chill shot.

Recently, he did it again. Same situation, different cast of characters. Except this time it was a woman I'd brought in from far out of town. And this time I chose to absent myself from the play. I suggested they go off together and just not bother to bother me. It was with a sigh of relief from me that they split my house. But I liked him a lot less. His lady friend wasn't too happy about it, either.

But what has gone down in the past two weeks, during the Writers Guild strike, has been the most souring.

For those of you who don't know what the strike's all about, or who have been confused by the stupid articles in The Hollywood Reporter (a simpleminded puff-sheet for the Producers Association that has traditionally bumrapped writers), be advised we are out on the bricks to get wage increases that have been substandard since 1951, plus many other areas where we who create the dreams feel we are entitled to a taste, seeing as how everyone else is getting fat. It's too complex to go into here, but suffice it, if you trust me at all, that it's a necessary strike and the Guild is on the side of the angels. (A few of whom, I'd love it a lot, should flap down and carry picket signs in front of Universal just to scare the piss out of Wasserman.)

My friend doesn't work much in TV, or films, but when he does, he reaps the benefits that other Guild members struck for and sweated for and negotiated for in years past. The Guild doesn't ask much of its members, actually. Years go by without any call on their time or efforts. But in a strike it's got to be solidarity or the pavement-pounding and out-of-work and go on for months. So everyone is called on to picket, or work in the Strike Action office, or drive a car to pick up people or somedamnthing...anything!

The strike has cost a great many good men and women their incomes, their jobs, their reputations. Joe Landon, one of the most honest and toughest guys in the Guild lost fifty grand when the producership of a show he was to ramrod was given to someone else, because Joe wouldn't cross the picket line. Doug Benton, who was producing Columbo, and George Eckstein, who was readying a pilot project, have both been canned by Universal and each has received threatening letters from Lew Wasserman--one letter says they're going to be sued for breach of contract, another says they're going to be held to the terms of the contracts--but even if we settle the strike next week, and all of us start working for the higher compensations that have been negotiated, those writer-producer hyphenates who've been loyal to their union will still never regain the lost wages their striking has cost them. Hell, Wasserman can meet the new increases in compensation using just the money he's stealing from Benton and Eckstein and other hyphenates. Liam O'Brien was supposed to fly to London to write a film for one of the struck studios. He didn't go. God knows how much he lost. People who've created TV shows and sold them for the first time in long years of struggling, have struck and been aced out of the Fall schedules.

My friend called me, the first morning of the strike, hysterical, and asked me, as a member of the Board of Directors of the Guild, to get him off picket duty because he was writing a book. Well, shit, I'm writing a book, too, and I have work stacked to the ceiling on my desk, but we're both freelancers and I know he can knock off for three or four hours once a week, to carry a picket sign, without seriously hindering his work schedule. I told him I couldn't and wouldn't do it, not even if I had the power, which I didn't. He thinks I'm a fucked-up friend. I think his ethics suck.

He's called me several times on the same subject. He ain't happy out there in the rain with that pole over his shoulder. I feel for him. But not much. We're all out there in the shitrain. He wants the gravy, even when he says he never asked to be a member of the Guild, that he was forced to join to write for TV (which, surprise, surprise, is the nature of a union), but he won't give even a few hours of his life in the common cause.

So it goes sour.

I see him as a man who can't be depended on when the crunch sets in. And if he trembles in a lightweight breeze like this, how dependable can he be when a hurricane hits?

What kills a friendship? Seeing the flaws in someone you thought was golden, and knowing those same flaws are in yourself; but knowing that having seen them there, they will not be permitted here.

The terrible part of losing a friend, the most terrible part, is seeing one you loved turn, like Jekyll into Hyde, from a friend into a hideous example.

Beware, I warn you, between meeting and parting, of confusing an acquaintance with a friend. They are two very different species. And for God's sake, learn which you are!

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THE HARLAN ELLISON HORNBOOK
Installment #22

They're truly touching, the little fools. They can't seem to differentiate between the stories they admire and the writer who wrote them. No, you bright-eyed little students and fans of Greatness, not me! It's not me you love, it's the talent. I have nothing to do with that: I'm the vessel into which the wine was poured, but the crockery has no sweetness, it merely suffers itself to be carried about and used, at the whim of the talent.

I stand up there and tell them, over and over again, "Toulouse-Lautrec once said, 'One should never meet an artist whose work one admires; the artist is always so much less than the work.'" I tell them that in lectures at high schools, in rap sessions at colleges, in essays accompanying my short stories, in person and in print. They refuse to listen. You refuse to listen!

Dan Blocker, who died, who used to be on *Bonanza*, once told me of a woman he encountered when he was putting in a personal appearance at a rodeo. She was a sweet, motherly old lady who came up to him and began talking to him as though he were Hoss Cartwright. "Ma'am," Dan said, stooping down to smile at her, "Hoss Cartwright is just the character I play on teevee; I'm Dan Blocker."

She smiled at him with one of those *aw g'wan with you* smiles, as though charmingly chiding him for thinking she was such a penny fool. And then she went on, "Yes, I know. Now...Hoss, when you get home to the Ponderosa tonight, you tell your daddy, Ben, to fire off that old Chinese man who's been doing your cooking! You and your brother Little Joe need a good woman in there to cook you some decent food..."

Nothing strange. Nothing out of the ordinary. She was a product of her times, her culture, and her inability to separate fantasy from reality; precisely because everything is done, every waking and sleeping moment of the day, to eradicate that important boundary from your minds. Where does shadow and image leave off and substance begin. None of us can tell any more. We really believe it matters what the car we buy looks like. We really believe there is "honor" in what happened in Vietnam. We really believe growing old is terrible.

You believe it. I don't.

And you really believe that there are living gods whom you can elevate to pedestals--famous writers, talented actors, adroit painters, dissembling politicians, slick columnists, guitarists and Fender bass players and mumblers of doggerel you delude yourselves into thinking are poets merely because their soggy images are shouted at 350 decibel amplification, their right hands grip a microphone, they sweat a lot, their bellies are flat, their clothes are sequined, and they're so hip they won't rhyme "June" and "Moon," but the banality of their lyrics is as awful as Rod McKuen's excrescences.

You cannot separate a talent from an individual. And so you raise to godhood those who, were they not gifted with that special ability, you would deride and pillory and cast into prisons for their selfishness, evil, rapacity and lack of humanity.

This week; the subject is godhood. I suppose, in some ways, an extension of last week's thought's on friendship. And since I'm clearly the only one among you pure enough, noble enough to discuss the subject critically, I'll cop to having been on both sides of the godhood scene--as god and worshipper--and tell you about two famous men I've known.

The first one is Herbert Kastle. He may not be famous to you nits who don't even know the names of the actors who strut for you, or the writers who scribble for you, or in fact the names of anyone failing to appear on the Johnny Carson Show, but around Dell and Avon paperbacks' publishing offices, around the money coffers of Great American Literary Houses like Bernard Geis and Delacorte, Herbert Kastle is famous as hell. You don't make $150,000 from THE MOVIE MAKER, $100,000 from MIAMI GOLDEN BOY and $100,000 from MILLIONAIRES (with the total far from registered) without becoming famous as hell. Not to you mud-condemned slugs who read books and never look at the names of the authors, but to the fat old tigers and their sleek editorial cubs who give out one hundred and fifty grand advances to authors who can come away from their own books with hundred thousand dollar royalties. (As a comparison, ninety per cent of the writers in the world never make a dime beyond the advance money they receive for a book, and the advances are usually about three thousand dollars. Now lay those figures against what Kastle carts off, and you'll realize how much greater must be the slice of the pie enjoyed by the publishers.)

Herb Kastle is famous. He's also likeable. He looks like a cuddly Jewish teddy bear, all the best kinds of character lines in his face, San Andreas crinkles radiating out from the corners of his eyes, no-shape comfortable body in which one could easily live if one's head was straight.

More important, Herb Kastle is a fine writer. His first few books, KOPTIC COURT (1958), CAMERA (1959), COUNTDOWN TO MURDER (1960), THE WORLD THEY WANTED (1961) THE REASSEMBLED MAN (1964) and HOT PROWL (1965), drew him to my attention as a man who wrote in that special cathartic style that spoke to Irwin Shaw's contention, "He is on a journey and he is reporting in: 'This is where I think I am and this is what this place looks like today.'" A writer does not write one novel at a time or one play at a time or even one quatrain at a time. He is engaged in the long process of putting his whole life on paper. For Herb Kastle--who, when he started, was a nice Jewish boy with a wife and a family and all the middle-class twitches to which we are all heir--writing was clearly a way of purging his soul, and the struggles with his identity were clear in every novel he wrote.

(That struggle is nowhere more evident than in his new novel, ELLIE, published by Delacorte Press on March 21st. It is very likely Kastle's finest work to date; a searing and unrelenting study of a man obsessed by that sex object most destructive to his nature. It will sell like orangeade at the final truck stop before the Gobi Desert. In publishing circles it is the "Last Tango" of the contemporary sex novels. I strongly urge you to slither out and buy it. It is guaranteed to mess your mind.)

The other day, Herb Kastle wandered into my house and finally, after fourteen years of what I'd taken to be a casual acquaintanceship, laid on me the crushing data that I had been a profoundly important influence on his life and his success. In some strange Vonnegut *baraaa* way, we are linked, and I'd never realized it. And in the moments after he blurted that linkage, I understood that I had been elevated to godhood.

And could not handle it.

I first met Herbert D. Kastle in New York, in 1958. We met in the offices of Theron Raines who, at that time was agenting for both of us. But I'd already (apparently had an effect on Herb. I'd been writing professionally for three years, was at that time in the Army and had come into New York on leave, to try and scare up some money. My first wife had run off again, for the millionth time, taking with her the furniture, all my clothes, and every cent in the bank account. I had decided to divorce her and was desperately trying to find the pennies to get back into civilian life.

I'd read KOPTIC COURT the year before and, without knowing Kastle, had fired off a letter to him through his publisher, enthusing about the vigor and honesty of the book. (It's recently been reprinted by Avon in paperback, and I re-read it a while ago; miraculously, it holds up as well as when I first came to it. It's another one I commend to your attention.)

The letter had been a casual thing for me. I'm inclined to revel in the utter craftsmanship of other writers, and like to let them know about it when it so seldomly occurs. But for Herb, I learned later, it was a seminal document. One of the things I'd talked about in glowing terms was that the novel had a last line punch like a short story, a very rare and difficult thing in this universe. I couldn't have known of it, of course, but Herb had worked on that ending for a week. He was justifiably proud of the effect it had gotten, and usually it's not the sort of thing readers notice. So here came my letter, out of nowhere, fast

ening on that certain special act he had performed with clean hands and dedication and composure...and someone had noticed.

When we met in Theron Raines's office, we immediately liked each other: I was pleased to meet a man who'd given me hours of fine reading, he was thrilled to meet a writer who had been deeply-enough affected by his life's work to send out a cry across the emptiness in which most writers work.

I can't recall meeting Herb again until almost ten years later, when I was already an established Hollywood writer, and his life and writing had taken a different, to me ominous, turn. (Although we almost shared a book once. Walter Fultz, the man who bought my first novel back in 1956, was editing for the now-defunct paperback house, Lion Books. He wanted to put together a co-authored volume of stories by Herb and me: my stories of the street gangs of Brooklyn, Herb's stories of the uptown young Jewish thugs. It never came off, and Lion Books had to close down when they got caught in a distributor's crunch. And Walter Fultz, just a few years ago, died suddenly and under mysterious circumstances; one of the finest men I have ever known. As a sidelight to the tragedy, Walter's emotional problem is one that, today, would be acceptable. Had he lived today instead of fifteen years ago, he would never have had to exist in the shadows of closets, would never have had to struggle with his life to seem to be that which he wasn't, would never have had to be ashamed of what he was, and he would be with us today. I miss him.)

Ten years later, I was working on "The Oscar" at Paramount for Joseph E. Levine. Herb had come out to California for a visit. His marriage of many years was on the rocks and he was putting a continent between himself and his pain; yet another foolishness: the shimmering interface between oneself and one's bad karma defies space-time equations: a continent is no thicker than a membrane when one carries the misery inside: there is no escape, no Cloud CooCoo Land, no place to hide, literally no doors and no windows.

Herb came to have lunch with me at the Paramount commissary. We were never alike. He was always subdued, cool, interiorly-directed, polite, charming. I was always a street urchin, quick to anger, quicker to cool down, rabidly enthusiastic about everything, flaming, loud, crude. Each has its merits and flaws. But we weren't alike. And it was the difference between us that drew us together. He liked my raw style, I envied his ease in moving through the world like a phantom cat burglar turned novelist. But there was no competition between us. Writers who are good are never in competition; each has a corner on the market for the special product each produces; no writer can write another's book, not really.

Yet I think only in the most recent past has Herb come to know something about me that functions as my driving force: I consider myself an Artist, not merely a scribbler. When we sat across from each other in the Paramount commissary, with actors and producers waving and me digging the shit out of it--a little kid from Painesville, Ohio playing at being in the magic land of Hollywood--Herb clearly saw me as a surrogate Sammy Glick, a moderately-talented writer who had used charisma and drive to cash in on the big time. He was wrong, of course, but he had no way of knowing it. And again, without my knowing I was doing it, I steered Herb's life in a direction that would shape all the rest of his days. Or so he tells me.

I had been offered a job writing a B flick for Bert I. Gordon, a very decent and charming man who made low-budget thrillers that could always be counted on to do well at the saturation booking level. I didn't have time to do it, I was scheduled for another Levine film after "The Oscar," and so I suggested to Herb that he recommend him to Bert Gordon for the project. I was, again, a casual thing, and I didn't even remember having done it until Herb reminded me the other day. It's the sort of kindness one does for one's friends without thinking in terms of coin returned.

I lost track of Herb; but what happened is that he got the assignment, wrote the screenplay for "The Museum of Dr. Freak" (which was shelved and never filmed for reasons probably having nothing whatever to do with the script), and from there moved on to scripts for the *Bonanza* and *Honey West* television series.

But from that lunch meeting, and from the tunnel vision through which Herb saw me...saw what he thought was me...he began to make notes on a Hollywood novel. He called before he flew back East with the outline for the book, and told me that he was about to change his life, that for the space of three books he was "going into business" and that he'd keep in touch. Then he went away.

In 1968 Herb sold THE MOVIE MAKER to the Mike Todd of the publishing world, Bernard Geis--he who gave us Jaqueline Susann--and it was an instant financial success. It was a splash book.

I bought a copy but didn't get around to reading it. On looking back, I think there was an ambience to the work that put me off, made it easier for me to rationalize why I didn't have the time to read the latest book by a writer whose every word had been absorbed minutes after coming into my possession. It had the unsavory aroma of something left too long on the meat hook. The scent of decaying orchids came off that book. It was probably my imagination.

A year later, when it was in paperback, a friend called me and said, "Hey, did you know there's a character in this cheap sex novel, THE MOVIE MAKER, who's a dead ringer for you? Do you know a guy named Herbert Kastle?"

I sat down and read THE MOVIE MAKER.

Yes. Herb Kastle had taken me as the model for Lars Wyllit, the driven, feisty, cunning, moderately-talented sexual profligate with hangups about his height. As I've said in this column many times, none of us care to cop to our true faces. Eichmann never thought of himself as a human monster, merely as a man doing his job. Capone never sat beside a swimming pool in Miami Beach, his brain rotting away from syphilis, saying to himself, "I'm a gangster." He surely thought of himself as a businessman. I've never known a hooker who thought of herself as anything different from a clerk in a Woolworth's. The image of me that had been filtered through Herb's mind struck me as being too blatant, too shallow, too easily-dismissed, too cartoony, to really touch anywhere near the complex wonderfulness that I knew was my real self.

Even so, Lars Wyllit was the only character in the book for whom the author showed any genuine love or caring. Cheap as that little fucker was, Lars Wyllit comes off well in the novel. A lot better than the Herb Kastle-surrogate, the ostensible hero of the novel, Charley Halpert, in whom Kastle displays a sort of pity and hopeless nobility.

I called Herb in New York, we talked, he asked if I was pissed-off at the way he'd portrayed me, I said no, he was more than entitled to write it any way he saw it ...and we promised to get together when next he came West.

Some time later, he did, and we got together at MGM where I was working. At that time, Herb talked about having done the Geis novel, and I ventured the opinion that it was not a particularly healthy book, from the outlook of a writer's self-analysis. It was a book of self-loathing. Herb didn't talk about that too much.

But the money was rolling in, the book had freed him of the rigors of his past and his unsuccessful marriage, and he was now in the process of reaching maturity; adjusting to a life-style that included fame, money and women. Lots of women. In a strange sort of way, I think I now see, Herb Kastle had come relatively late to success, and he was trying to live the life he thought

I lived. In some ways he had perceived correctly about me, for I, too, have always been cannibalistically hungry for success, but he had overlooked a core truth. I had always been poor and driven, he had had critical acclaim and middle-class comfort; when I began to "make it," it came slowly, in gradual stages, like taking immunization shots of rattlesnake venom so when the big bite came, I sickened, but did not die. Herb, on the other hand, was trembling with the venom from a massive overdoes all at once.

On the inside cover of my Bantam paperback copy of CAMERA, he wrote this, in 1969: "Harlan: Here are a few beasts who cried sex at the heart of love. You could say this novel was the first step away from KOPTIC COURT toward MOVIE MAKER & the three Bernard Geis novels that will follow. Wonder if I'll ever turn back again. Best wishes, Herb Kastle."

It was a turn away from the heart of love about which Herb Kastle had written so feelingly. THE MOVIE MAKER had a raw and bloody fascination, but it was a book of self-hate and the horror of self-discovery. I could only hope Herb would find his way out of the swamp.

We didn't see each other again for some years. His next novel, MIAMI GOLDEN BOY, was published with the same hoopla as THE MOVIE MAKER and, the wheel turns, the wheel turns, it came my way as a review assignment for the Los Angeles Times Book Review Section. I read the book, and thought it was rather undistinguished, the sort of thing one comes to expect from Bernard Geis sexploitation writers, hardly the gleaming jewel Herb Kastle had proffered in years past. I reviewed it honestly, but not harshly. I did a full takeout on "schlock" novelists, rating them from the best of the species--with Herb, James Michener and David Slavitt (Henry Sutton) at the top, down through Irving Wallace, Richard Brautigan, Leon Uris, Harold Robbins and others in the mid-rank to "troglodytes" like Jaqueline Susann and Taylor Caldwell in the sub-cellar--and apparently, again without meaning to do it, I influenced Herb's life because the review caused MIAMI GOLDEN BOY to sell better in Los Angeles than anywhere else in the nation. Pickwick would not keep it in stock.

And Herb read the review. He read it and he heard the tone of sadness for the Kastle-who-had-been.

We talked of it on several occasions. And he told me MILLIONAIRES, the third of the big-money books he'd "gone into business" to write so he could break free of his old life, was a better book. He hoped I'd like it.

I did. It was strong, determined, honest, and yet held all the commercial elements that mean big paperback reprint sales, movie deals, attraction for the under-the-hair-dryer set.

He had taken a direction with his talent he knew was dangerous, but apparently he had come back from the edge at the final tick of midnight. Herb Kastle has always seemed to me a writer who possessed that rare inner vision to truly know what he's writing, how good or bad it is, what its worth to posterity and to his own self-esteem, and thank God not even the $100,000 rolls in the hay of success could take that from him.

Now it's 1973, and Herb lives out here. He's writing movies, he's living in a beautiful home, he has the lifestyle his adolescence demanded and his maturity finds supportable. He went into and came out on the other side of a mutually destructive love affair with a woman who forms the model for Ellie in the new novel. He wrote the book with ferocity and the need for purification of system one gets from a sauna bath, and it reads with the drive and fire of a man who has glimpsed a personal hell and decided not to burn.

But he walks in here and tells me I'm the one who brought him to this place, at this time; and I shudder to think he genuinely believes it.

I am not his god, or his mentor, or his stalking horse. I did whatever was done without even thinking of the life and soul of Herb Kastle. And that's the bottom line about elevating mere mortals to godhood: gods are as liable to hurt as help, and because they do not understand the enormity of their power, they make no distinctions between the two.

And so, even as Herb wrote ELLIE as an open letter to be read by that one woman, as I wrote last week's column on friendship for that one friend to read, so I write these words about the folly of ever letting oneself be totemized by one's friends or fans or acquaintances. And I tell you to your face, Herbert D. Kastle, I reject the office. Keep it for yourself.

And since I've run out of space this week, I'll resume the chronicle of godhood, and about how I made the mistake Herb made in worshipping another human being, the week after next. Next week I want to talk about the animated film festival at the LA County Museum of Art, since it opens next week and if I wait it'll be dated. But come back for some light chatter next week, and the week after that I'll tell you how my personal God shoved a flaming stick up my ass.

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The previous installments of THE HARLAN ELLISON HORNBOOK are column numbers 21 and 22 and they originally appeared in 1973 in The Los Angeles Free Press.

Photo by: Steven Stone

WILLIAM ROTSLER REMEMBERS...

ILLUSTRATED BY KEN MITCHRONEY.

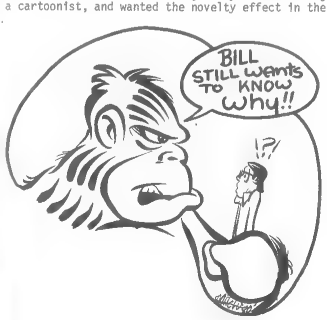
Scene: 3am, in a hotel room in St. Louis, during the 1969 Worldcon. I started drawing and for some reason, gave a drawing to Harlan, who was sitting there on the floor with me. He captioned it and obviously loved it. It was a gag on King Kong, so I did another ...and another...and another.

Sometime the next day, he walked up and handed me one of 100 copies of The Kong Papers. He'd had them I-teked and conned some fans into collating them. He sold copies at one dollar, and later sold the spread to a men's magazine (Knight magazine, April 1973), and put them into PARTNERS IN WONDER.

It's the worst piece of shit I ever did.

But *those* are the cartoons people remember, because of their repeated appearance. I think they are terrible, but whenever I mention this, Harlan yells something about "all the money" they made for me. I wish I had paid him *not* to publish them.

You see, I think he was intrigued by collaborating with a cartoonist, and wanted the novelty effect in the book.



I still think, by comparison to the rest of my work, they were shit. I'm embarrassed by them. Oh well, I can hear Harlan yell now.

#2 - Scene: Beverly Hills, early 1965. I had gotten Harlan a date with a very attractive actress named Arlene Starr (yes, I know, but she claims it's her real name). Arlene, Harlan, myself and my Most Beautiful Redhead in The World, Michele, spent the day running around together. We stopped at Martindale's, a large bookstore, where H.E. wanted to see if they were properly displaying his books. We stayed in the car.

After some time, he had not emerged, so we all went to the bookstore entrance. The sudden arrival of two beautiful women drew quite a few eyes. Michele Saroyan said, loudly, "Someone said there was a Harlan Ellison in here!"

We saw him standing at the girlie book counter, looking at a nudist magazine. We all said at once, pointing, "*There he is now!*" and we started for him in a body.

Harlan, utterly expressionless ("I don't know these nits from Adam!"), closed the magazine and started away in the opposite direction. But there was no exit that way and we were gaining fast, saying things like "Harlan Ellison!" and "Don't let him get away!"

Wooden faced, he reversed around some book tables and headed for the door with the three of us running after him. I shall never forget the walking-fast-but-not-*quite*-running gait and the expressionless look. He may not have been back to that store since.

#3 - Scene: Harlan's home, specifically his new addition, there's a pool table; above is his office.

Playing pool was comics star Len Wein. Watching were myself and Marv Wolfman, the *other* big star of the comical world. Marv left. I said, "Let's hide."

Harlan and Len dropped their cues without a word and the three of us *lunged* through the secret panel into the secret hideaway room which he had built into the addition to his house. When Marv came back, we were in the darkness, lying on the floor of a small, padded L-shaped secret room, stifling our infantile giggles.

Marv searched. And searched. And searched. He *knew* we had gone into the secret room, but he didn't know where it was. We were like little kids hiding from a playmate. Harlan eventually sneaked out, appearing "magically," but I don't think Marv ever quite forgave us. (Or found the secret room.)

Incidently, within the lava-rock-lined, bottom-padded room, there is a secret panel.

#4 - Scene: Some L.A. science-fiction convention or other, probably a Westercon, about 1972.

I was drawing and had gathered a crowd of maybe thirty people. Harlan walked up. One of the dum-dums, in the way that eventually was to drive Harlan away from attending cons at all, said, "Why don't you and him fight?"

Harlan totally blew their minds--and unsettled own, I admit--by saying, "No...I love that man."

#5 - Scene: A Westercon in San Diego, probably 1966.

Harlan was guest of honor and in his speech he got up and absolutely laid waste around him, telling fandom what nerds and nits and assholes they were, how they talked of the future and dressed ala 1949, how they called themselves star-begotten and were afraid to think, etc etc. At the end, he got a standing ovation. I had tears in my eyes. The nasty little kid who had started out at fifteen or whatever, annoying the hell out of everyone, had not only grown up, but he had rubbed their noses in it.

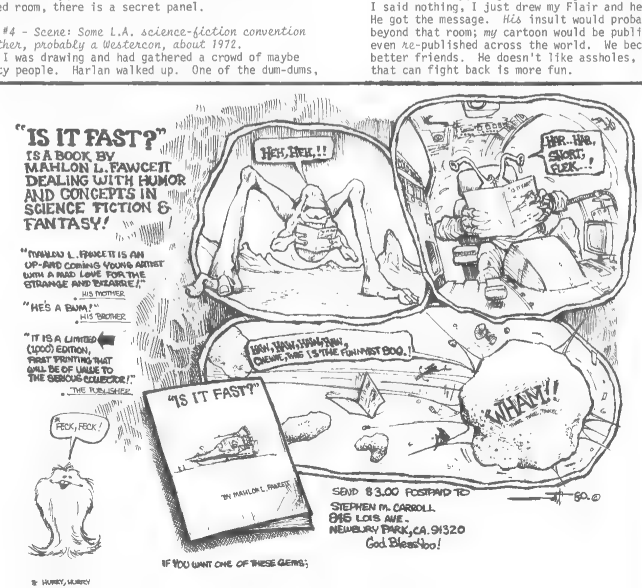
I loved it. I loved him.

In a hallway the next day I told him my reaction. Harlan alone is often different than the Public Harl Our relationship changed that day, and it has been growing ever since.

#6 - Scene: Some con or other, late 1960s.

Harlan, in those days, in purest self-defense, would walk into a room and machine-gun the inhabitan with insults. Get them before they get him. Becaus they would *always* try to get him, the fools. It was the young gunfighter-old gunfighter syndrome.

So one day, he gave me one gratuitous insult. I said nothing, I just drew my Flair and held it up. He got the message. *His* insult would probably trave beyond that room; *my* cartoon would be published and even re-published across the world. We became even better friends. He doesn't like assholes, and some that can fight back is more fun.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PECK, PECK!
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IF YOU WANT ONE OF THESE GEMS;

HARLAN ELLISON RESPONDS

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What follows is Harlan's good-natured reply and explication of what William Rotsler remembered on the previous two pages.

* * * * * * * *

Scene 1: William manifests an attitude toward "The Kong Papers" that is, in intensity, way out of proportion to their impact. That they may be light-years in quality from the work William considers his best is a judgment no one, not even I, has the right to contest. He's the artist and he knows if the work is shit or not. Nonetheless, they are a group of innocent, amusing little drawings that give people pleasure; and they have a right to live for that excellent reason. I've seen people come across those cartoons, never having heard of me or William, turn to them idly, smile, smile again, give a small laugh, nod bemusedly...and pass on. They do no harm. Further, I resonate to William's annoyance at the continued life and low-level popularity of the cartoons: each of us has work that we did with out left hand, five-finger exercises, knocked off for personal amusement...work we consider less than our "serious" art...that somehow goes on and on when we wish if would simply fade out. I have a couple of those and I loathe them. So I cannot be entirely unsympathetic to William's vehemence on this subject. In defense of the innocent, however, and in support of the right of the innocent to live, I say this: it may not be that repeated appearance of the cartoons makes them memorable. They aren't *that* omnipresent, after all. I suggest they continue to live simply because they are gentle, they are innocent, they demand little but reward with smiles and the warmth of childhood amusements. So perhaps they aren't high art, Bill; but what harm do they do?

Scene 2: It wasn't a nudist magazine. This is not to say I do not enjoy magazines with naked women in them. I do. But it just wasn't such a magazine that time. It was an issue of Adam, a men's magazine with pictures of naked women in it. But I wasn't looking at naked women. I was looking to see if Adam had reprinted one of my stories. In those days I was pretty broke, and I was selling off second and third publication rights to my old suspense and juvenile delinquency stories to the publishing company that did Adam, Knight, Cad and a raft of others. But it was only a hundred bucks or so for each piece used, and they paid on publication. They also never bothered to let you know when something was going to appear. So that meant, if you were low in the exchequer, that you haunted the newsstands to see which of the company's periodicals had sneaked onto the rack when you weren't looking. If you were lucky, the right byline appeared on the table of contents and within half an hour you could be down at the offices of Adam, et al, at 8060 Melrose Avenue...and get a check. So naked ladies are a nice, clothed ladies are another nice, but eating with some regularity is nicer yet. Sorry, Bill; it weren't no nudist magazine; it were hunger pangs.

Scene 3: It ain't a room, strictly speaking, William. It's a *grotto*. And it ain't lined with lava rock, it's featherstone, which is something else. And I never actually thought of the door to the clothes closet in the grotto as being behind a secret panel, but I guess it is. Gee, that's neat: you have to enter the secret hidden grotto through a secret panel...and inside the secret panel there's a secret panel. Gee. Wow. Neat.

Scenes 4, 5 & 6: It occurs to me that William is more into *macho* than I am. But maybe it's just that most of my life has been confrontation of one sort or another, and I'm acclimated to the hot weather so completely that I don't see such encounters in terms of High Noon the way Bill does. On the other hand, maybe that's wrong.

The secret of my friendship with William Rotsler, by the way, is that he respects me and likes me, but most of all he's amused and entertained by me. If he had an organ-grinder's license we could go into business together. For my part, the answer to the friendship is much easier to codify: he is my equal, and there ain't many of whom I can say the same.

Captions by

HARLAN ELLISON

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Photos by

James Van Hise

ELLISON WONDERLAND: A PHOTO-JOURNAL

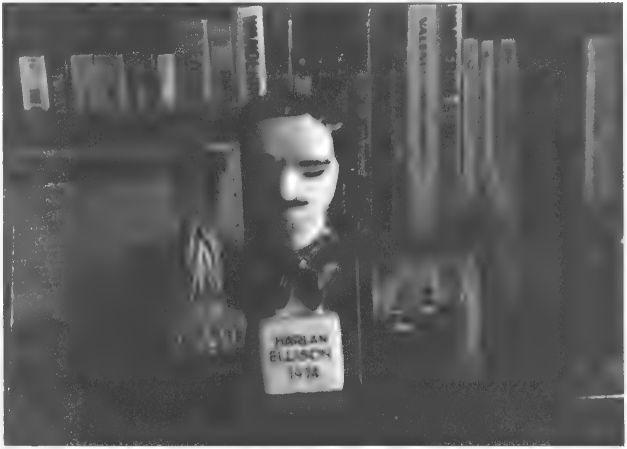
My writing place. At extreme right is the sound system control center for the Quad Electrostatic Screen stereo rig that reproduces concert hall quality music. To the left of the typewriter was the half-finished manuscript of my latest work, the novella "All the Lies That Are My Life."

View out of my office, across the roof of the house through a section of the Robert Silverberg Memorial Cactus Garden. The trampoline-like object at far right is a sunning circle to lie out upon, to take the rejuvenating rays of the sun. By the way: when I go to lecture in dismal places like Billings, Montana or Columbus, Ohio, I'm always asked how I can bear to live in hideous Los Angeles with all that smog. I tell them I don't get much of that. I tell them that on at least 300 of 365 days a year I can see out of my office, 36 miles across the San Fernando Valley to the San Berdoo Mountains. Here is proof. Even on a randomly selected day when Jim Van Hise came to take these pictures, the mountains way back there are visible.

Another view of my office, looking from the writing platform across the open atrium to the window seat. The two naked posts you see, by the time this appears in print, will be covered by $10,000 worth of magnificent fantasy sculpture pillars by Steve Kirk, designer of the Abominable Snowman in Disneyland's Matterhorn. His brother, Tim, is insanely jealous of how good Steve's work is. Just to the left of the post at far right is the deco staircase leading downstairs to the pool room. Skylights at left top.

Another shot in my office. The story files containing all the original manuscripts of my work. The numbers run from 1 to 22. The wall above is a partial chronology of books I've written or books containing my work. Bosch's "Tower of Babel" is at far right. The small sign top center says NO SMOKING in Gaelic.

A dim photo taken in my office. In b.g. is part of a shelf containing books I've written or books containing my stories. In the foreground is a framed telegram from the producers of I, ROBOT congratulating me on completing the script, the British Fantasy Society 1978 award for Best Short Story, the Mystery Writers of America award, a framed photo of me in the plastic tent at Iguanacon writing a story, and the Locus Poll award.



More books by me and some of the Hugos I've won.

My Nebula awards and more books I've written.

Downstairs of my office in the new south wing of the house. On the large baronial chair dimly seen at extreme left is the Ellison family crest. I am about to bank the 6 ball cross-table into the hip pocket closest to my left hand. This is a fairly simple shot requiring "draw" on the cue ball, proper "english" on the object ball, perfect eye-to-hand coordination and a steady eye. To assist me in making this shot, I am wearing my lucky Yellow Cab cap from the days in NYC when I drove a hack.

A sensational sculpture by Brett Bather depecting "A Boy and His Dog." This kid is spectacular and his work is among my favorites in the house.

"The War Machine," a metal sculpture by Frank Lago.

Another sensational sculpture by Brett Bathen depicting my story "Catman."

A shot in my office. My Xerox 3100 copier. The Cheshire Cat is a subtle play on the words "copy" cat. Yuk yuk. More awards on the wall. More files to the right. One of my many Jiminy Cricket icons can be seen just above the award at lower left with my name in bold letters.

Looking through the divider counter between dining room into kitchen, at the Master of the Manse and his refrigerator, festooned with Foghorn Leghorn, assembled Shadow jigsaw puzzle, Rumph wizard coffee pot, and a Dillon etching used in the LA Free Press for H.E.'s television column in the 70's.

A nice shot in color (which you'll see reproduced in b&w, thereby making it incomprehensible) of the latest addition to the house: the Art Deco Dining Pavilion off the kitchen. Created by me, designed by Carol Barkin, built by Leon Opseth and $28,000 woth of artisans.

A reverse shot on the dining room. Candy machine at extreme right. Forties' juke box that plays 78 rpm's beside it, case at far right contains only rock albums. Wall case contains classical music. Bookcase at left begins the hardcovers that are arranged alphabetically by author throughout the joint; on the ceiling are film posters from Gunga Din, Thief of Bagdad, Citizen Kane, etc. Dillon drawings from DANGEROUS VISIONS at top center. In the middle of the designer table is a $700 sterling silver Art Deco champagne boat in the shape of a Viking ship.

Closeup of that sterling silver Deco champagne boat.

A wall sculpture attached to the fireplace in the living room.

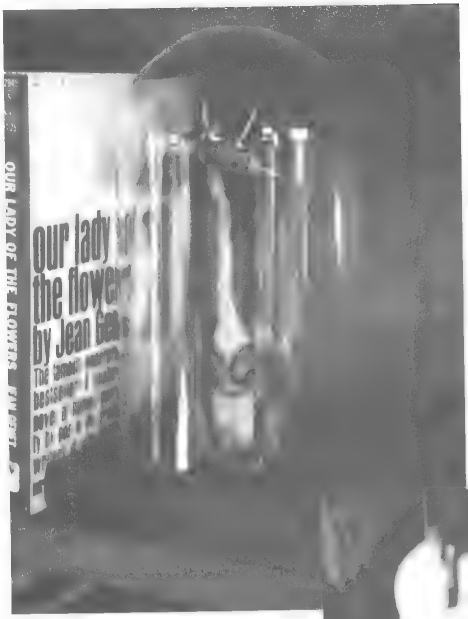
One of my many chess sets. This one is of Babylonian origin. Showing Gilgamesh, Inkidu, Umbabwe and that whole crowd.

A Jim Rumph King Kong mug in the bookcase in the front hall.

More art and sculpture. A classic Chinese temple icon, an acrylic by Pebworth, a wax sculpture of a writer by Robinson, a western bronze on manzanita root and etcetera. Bookcase, front hall.

The "Balloon Man" by Charles Bragg. Front hall. The glass pane at far right isn't there any longer. It's been replaced by stained glass panels. The little button on the wall at bottom left is a warning light attached to the complex and extensive alarm system protecting the house.

e door leading into the south wing. t is four feet high and was created Mabel & Milon Hutchinson, who were ise Nevelson's mentors. This is n the front hall just to the right the front door entrance to the se proper.



Front hall bookcase. A dragon by Tim Kirk. A book by Jean Genet.

A close-up of some art and sculpture shown at another angle on a previous page. Also shown here is a bronze demon by Charles Bragg.

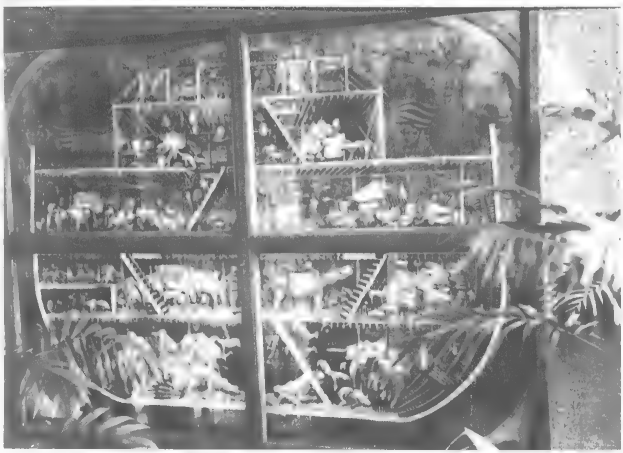
The west wing hallway. Doorway to master bedroom on right, the guest bedroom--the blue bedroom--on the left. Indecipherable art on walls. Smoke alarm on ceiling.

A shot that confuses angles. What you are looking at is a corner of the dining room (right half of the photo) and a view into the kitchen at left. Through the doorway in the center you can see through into the front hall with steps leading up to the living room. Picasso "royal flush" plates on the wall at upper right; the original Emshwiller drawings from AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS, *in an unbroken line begin a circle of the dining room at top center. Though I don't drink, the bar at the right contains viands to sustain all my drunken friends.*

My bedroom. The platform is hollow and contains enormous storage space for boxes of books.

A wall of art in the pool room of the south wing. Art by Kent Bash, Mike Kaluta, Leo & Diane Dillon, Don Ivan Punchatz, Erte', Kanemitsu, Barry Smith and others. At the right can be seen a few of my Art Deco pieces, a Maples of London period bar lined with cobalt glass.

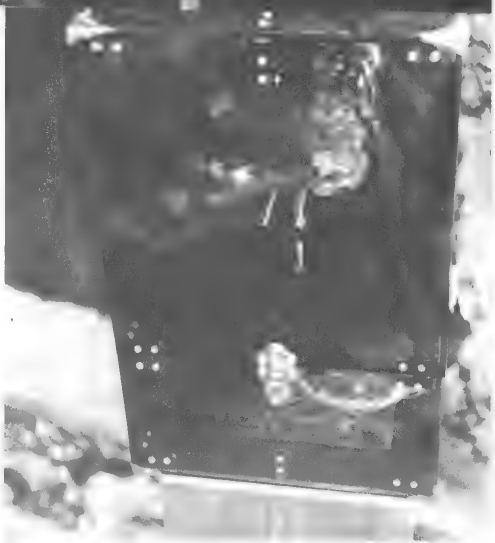
A shot of the living room, though you can't really get an estimate of the size. Art wall on right, Corinthian leather sofa on right (courtesy Ricardo Montalban), Betamax rig and Glass Teat on left, an a bunch of really gorgeous pieces of art and furniture that don't show in Van Hise's lousy photo. You wouldn't know this is a really warm, comfortable room, would you?



A piece of student art I bought when out in Iowa or some such place. I do that a lot.

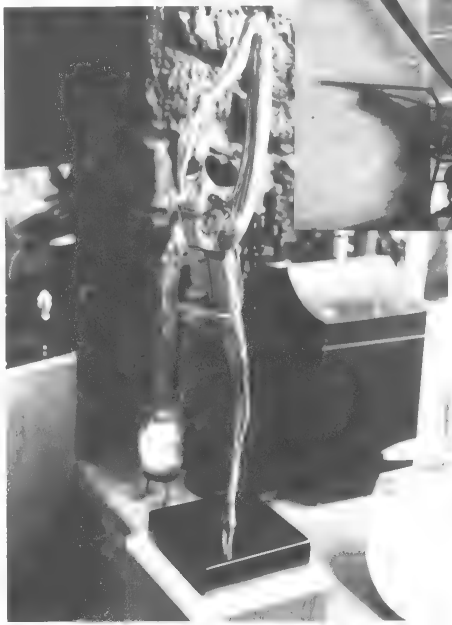
Ah. Better views of the living room. The art wall on the right. Hirschfield, Dillons galore, Wunderlich, Bette Fast, Campanile, a small Rotsler, Ben Roberts and rich Corinthian leather.

Further around that wall, and the rear wall of the living room. The ceiling fixture of smoked and cobalt glass is a Deco original from the first Exposition des Arts Decoratifs dans Paris, 1925. The records in the cases along the floor are all jazz, about 7000 albums ranging in material back to about 1920 to present. Stained glass "sunburst" window center top. This begins the paperback arrangement in the house, with "A" at the top left of the first shelf.



...ngles on a kinetic
...pture in an acrylic
...t by Michael Mayock.
... called "The Brain"
... the eye-receptors
...p a sequence of num-
... I bought this a
... ...rs ago at Kent
...y University from
... ...list. It is in
... living room and is
...ely memorable.

A Giacometti-like sculpture by Boyd, purchased in 1966. By the time this sees print, the wall behind this sculpture will have been knocked out and a new art gallery will have been built.



You can't tell that this is about four feet tall because of the angl but I blew $2000 in Paris for it, three years ago. It's a Bolshoi ballerina by Charpentier. The duty shipping it back would gag a buzzard.

Two angles on the Poe puppet that dominates the living room. I try to keep the Good Edgar before me at all times, to remind me what heights fantasy can reach.

[EDITOR'S NOTE]: These twenty pages only give you a small idea of what Harlan's home is really like. To truly do a spread like this the right way it would have to be in full color and sixty pages long. *Then* you'd really get a better idea of what "Ellison Wonderland" is like to explore, much less to live in!

HARLAN ELLISON

ON THE AIR

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CONDUCTED BY Denny Lane. *EDITED BY John Turek.*

This interview is transcribed from an interview done on the radio at WSHE MIAMI in April, 1976. Like all material in this issue, it was approved for publication by Harlan Ellison.

* * *

I HAD UNDERSTOOD YOU WERE ABOUT THIRTY-THREE, AND I WAS SAYING TO MYSELF, "HE'S ONLY SIX YEARS OLDER THAN ME," AND, THINKING AS A WRITER, IT ALMOST FRUSTRATES ME. BUT YOU'RE FORTY-ONE, AND WILL BE FORTY-TWO IN MAY.

I've been writing, Christ, since I was maybe ten years old, but professionally since I was nineteen or twenty. So it's just about twenty years that I've been working.

WHAT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY, YOUR SUN SIGN?

[Laughing] I have no idea. I don't believe in Astrology. May 27th is when I was born, but when people ask me that I usually tell them that I don't know, that I was an orphan; I was left on the steps of a foundling home, that way I don't have to listen to any Astrological bullshit.

WELL...I WOULD DIFFER WITH YOU. TO ME, ASTROLOGY IS ONE OF THE TOOLS OF THE UNIVERSE. A TOOL TO HELP US UNDERSTAND HOW THE ENERGY FLOWS THROUGH US.

What am I going to say to you? I don't know what it is. I'm very pragmatic. I work with what's there, and when I see evidence of whatever is there, then I'll work with that. I just add it on to the flow of information, but I know too many people who live off Astrology, and it's no better a tool than just the perceived world.

NOT AN ESCAPE.

Well, they seem to go from that into believing in Scientology, and then Atlantis, and then flying saucers, and then little green men who are under their bed, and the demon who lives in your ear, and all that kind of crap. I don't even believe in the Great Pumpkin, so what am I to say?

DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU'RE AWARE OF YOURSELF?

Oh yeah. I'm very comfortable in my skin. I live in my body very well. It took me a long time to get that way. I was like everybody else, I guess, in that I was concerned about looks, height and the things that I said, and now I just carry my act with me. I think that's the answer to anybody's problem. You've just got to carry your scene with you. Whoever you are, just be it wherever you might be. That's my wonderful Norman Vincent Peale philosophy for the day. I try not to take myself too seriously. That's the death of innocence. So if I give you a flip answer, it's not because I'm trying to be a wise-ass, it's just that I don't like pontificate too much.

LIFE IS TO ENJOY. I KNOW WHAT I WANT YOU TO EXPLAIN. YOU SAID THAT YOU HAVE TWO HUNDRED PEOPLE A DAY WRITE TO YOU.

Well, two hundred pieces of mail, maybe 140 of them are fan mail, and the rest of it is all business.

YOU SAID SOMETHING ON THE TOM SNYDER SHOW ABOUT PEOPLE WRITING TO YOU SAYING THAT YOU'RE A SAVIOR.

Oh yeah, and it's all such bullshit. People read my stories, and I don't doubt that they find things in my stories that relate to what's going down in their life on a given day, but I still think it's incredibly silly for people to write to a writer. I'm a professional liar, that's all I am. I'm paid to make up stuff. They write to me and they say, oh, you're fighting the fight for us, and you're our voice, and that's bullshit. I'm nobody's voice but my own. That's what killed Jimmy Baldwin when he started believing that he was the voice of the black man, and it ruined him as a writer. I don't speak for anybody but myself. I'm selfish and greedy just like everybody else, and if I say things, it's because I'm pissed off about them. I don't do it out of any great sense of nobility.

People write to me and they say the most amazing things. Women write me and say they haven't committed suicide because of something in a story of mine they read. That's nonsense. They wouldn't have committed suicide if they'd read something in the Reader's Digest. I get all this mail, and it's very nice to get, and it's very nice to have people think you're valuable, but if I for a moment started to believe all that bullshit, for Christ's sake, I'd wind up as Billy James Hargis or Oral Roberts, or one of those sanctimonious blimps. I don't want to lead anybody's parade.

WOULD YOU DEFINE YOURSELF AS AN ARTIST?

Yeah, I suppose. The onerous responsibility of putting a big "A" on the word artist is that it also involves taking yourself seriously. What I do take seriously is my writing. I'm very conscientious about it. It means a great deal to me. So in that way, yes, technically I am an artist, but I never think of myself as one. I never sit down and say, I'm an artist and today I will create a great thing, but what I do is sit down and say I've got this dynamite story to tell. How do I do it? I try to have as much personal fun as possible, and I don't think that should make one eligible to be a savior.

SO IDEAS COME TO YOU A LOT?

Oh, an enormous amount of ideas. There isn't enough time in the day for me to write everything I've got to write. I've got ideas stacked up for, god, ten years to come. In fact, I've got books that I've signed contracts for for four years to come, which is why I'm very jealous of my time. That's why I hate it when people write to me, because every time I have to answer a letter, it steals a little time away from a story that should be written, and if I don't answer them, they get really pissed off and they write me and say, *you son-of-a-bitch, why didn't you answer, I sent you a letter,* and it was written on toilet paper with red crayon. *Why didn't you write me, I asked you four hundred questions about yourself, why didn't you answer them all?* Sometimes I get very angry with people, and I'll send them a note and say, "Thank you very much for writing me, and I appreciate it, but please don't write to me any more, I'm terribly sorry but I just don't have the time to write," which is straightforward, no bullshit. They they'll write me back and say, *who the hell do you think you are you uppity son-of-a-bitch.* Well, who I am is someone who wants to be as private as he wants to be. I don't go running into their life, so why do they come running into mine? Am I bitching and barfing? Yeah, I guess I sound like I'm beefing. I don't mean to be.

WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS THAT YOU CHOOSE TO RUN YOUR OWN LIFE, AND YOU WISH TO BE LEFT ALONE TO DO THAT.

Yeah, pretty much. You find that if you gain any kind of notoriety at all in this country today, and maybe in the world today, that people turn vampire on you. That goes for anybody, even Zsa Zsa Gabor. I'm sure the same thing happens to her and to people who are eminently more worthy than I am. They're deluged with this kind of thing. There are people who just try to suck their blood. People don't even understand. It's horrifying! They call you up and they say, gee, *I really dig what you write and I'd love to come over and talk to you.* Well what the hell do they think I do every day, just lounge around? No, I get up at five in the morning, and I start writing, and I'm still working at three the next morning. I only get three or four hours of sleep a night because I've got so damn much to do, and so little time to do it. That's one of those things that people steal from you that can never be replaced. If someone rips me off, busts me in the street and takes my money, that's cool, I can get more money. There, take my watch and break my leg, the leg will heal. But time! Time is gone, man! There's just not enough of it and I'm very jealous of it.

It's not that I'm a recluse. Christ, I'm really very accessible as you found out. I'm really not an ivory tower-ish type. I'm garrulous and I like to be around people. I really like that a lot. I've got a lot of friends, and we do a lot of shit. We go out, we go to restaurants, to concerts, and things like that. That's great fun, but that's playtime. When it's worktime, I want to be left alone, and it's very hard to get people to understand that. Even my poor secretary! Some days she just breaks down and weeps because they won't stop!

I'm starting to sound like the Randy Newman song, "It's Lonely At The Top."

WHAT IS THE PROCESS YOU USE TO TAKE AN IDEA AND STRETCH IT OUT INTO A STORY?

How do you take a *situation* and make it into a story; that's the secret. *Everybody* gets situations. They say, gee, wouldn't it be funny if...and then you run for a number. It's plotting it and peopling it with human beings that makes it. For instance, one day I was sitting in a Chinese restaurant in L.A. with nineteen friends. We'd had an autograph party for a friend of mine named Arthur Cover. He did a book called AUTUMN ANGELS, and he's a marvelous kid. We were sitting around and we got to talking about ghost stories, and somebody said, "Well, every kind of ghost story has been written," you know, so what the hell is there left to write? I thought, there's gotta' be an idea nobody's done, so I sat there for a little bit and I said, "Oh, what a dynamite idea!" What I thought about was a Jewish kid, typical upper middle class Jewish guy whose mother has been *nuhdzing* him all his life, and she dies. Now he's got the house and he's thinking about what he's going to do with his life now after thirty years of having to live with his mother.

That's another error people make. They think that everything I write is autobiographical, and it's not. Of course I take from my own life, because I'm Jewish. I know about that kind of family. But my mother has never been like that. I was on the road when I was thirteen, so my mother never had the chance to be one of those kind of people, but she wouldn't have been in any case. She just wasn't that kind of lady. She was very independent in any case.

> "They write to me and they say, oh you're fighting the fight for us, and you're our voice, and that's bullshit. I'm nobody's voice but my own."

So I got the idea and I started screaming for a typewriter in the Chinese restaurant. Fortunately, some friends of mine had been down on their luck and they had ripped-off an office supply place and they had about half a dozen electric typewriters in their van. (I know a lot of strange kind of people.) One of them went out and brought back an IBM Selectric and plunked it down in front of me on this huge round table in the Chinese restaurant. Everybody else is looking and they couldn't figure out what was going on, and I started writing the story right there in the restaurant. I only wrote a couple pages of it which was enough to get the idea down. But I didn't have a story. I had a situation. So I let it sit for awhile and about two weeks ago, I did a gig in L.A. where I sat in the front window of a bookstore, "A Change of Hobbit." I try to do one big promotion a year there to help keep them in business because they keep all my books in stock and they're good to the fantasy writers, and it's kind of a symbiotic relationship. My gig this year was that I would sit in the window for six days from when they opened at 10:30 in the morning until the moment they closed, which is five or six o'clock at night, and I wrote a story a day in the window. Right there before the eyes of God and everybody. Anyone who bought ten dollars worth of books, or better, would get an autographed Xerox copy of that day's story. The final day, Saturday, we had an autograph party and an auction, and we auctioned off the original manuscripts. She made five grand that week, which is very nice to help pay off the mortgage and all that kind of thing. One of the stories that I picked to write was "Mom." In the whole story she *nuhdzes* him, but in the end she got totally outfoxed because she fixed him up with Joan of Arc. The ultimate *shiksa*. I hope that's not too subtle for people, but maybe it is. I don't know.

I'M ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO DOESN'T GRAB THE SUBTLE ALL THE TIME. THERE'S SOME SUBTLETTES THAT I DON'T GET. SOMETIMES IT'S HARD TO TRANSFER THE ENERGY. I SAW A "SPACE:1999" THE OTHER NIGHT...

How sad for you. You poor thing, don't you have anything better to do with your time than watch that stuff?

I WATCH IT FOR IDEAS. I REALLY LIKE SEEING SOMETHING DIFFERENT THAN THE SAME OLD "STAR TREK." BUT ANYWAY, HERE'S SOME OF MY NOTES FROM THE SNYDER SHOW.

SNYDER ASKED A QUESTION, AND YOU SAID, "THE LESSON IN THAT." THAT SEEMED TO ME TO BE VERY IMPORTANT.

It's that even when you go through real shit, anything in life can teach you a lesson if you're hip enough to pick it up. That's the saddest thing about human beings to me. You can take a paramecium, and if

you put it too near heat, it'll just never go near heat again. A single celled creature even knows. The dumbest animal on the street knows that it doesn't run in front of a car. But people keep going back and making the same goddamn mistakes over and over and over again. It's Santayana's quote, that "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it." There's a lesson, and I try to learn the lessons. I've had my downers the same as everybody else, but I try never to make the same one twice.

YOU ALSO SAID, "I WANT THEM TO KNOW WHAT I KNOW." WHAT BURNING THINGS DO YOU WANT TO SHARE?

I don't even know which things I know that people are going to need. Here's a for instance. One of my stories, in fact a lot of my stuff, is being used in psychiatric hospitals. Don't ask me why, but apparently patients relate to fantasy a lot better than they do reality, and there are a couple of people in different hospitals who have found that my stories, when given to or read to patients, directly influence their therapy.

"In fact I've got books that I've signed contracts for for four years to come, which is why I'm very jealous of my time. That's why I hate it when people write to me, because every time I have to answer a letter, it steals a little time away from a story that could be written."

One of them was a nurse who wrote me from New York state somewhere and said that one of my stories in the book APPROACHING OBLIVION helped her. She was reading it while sitting up all night in the room with a guy who had tried to commit suicide, and had tried it repeatedly. He was not fooling around. This guy had really done the numbers, and it had only been by the merest chance that they had stopped him. They had to straitjacket him, because if they left him, he'd have broken up a window and just taken the glass and slashed his throat with it. So she was sitting there reading it, and he said, "What are you reading?" She said a book of fantasy by this guy Ellison, and he said, "Oh, read me one." So she picked the shortest one, and it happened to be a little thing called "Ecowareness." It's just a little parable about the Earth waking up one day and finding itself completely covered over with concrete. It gets really pissed off and one of the things it does is swallow Barbra Streisand and her entire townhouse in New York. It just swallows the whole thing and you can hear her "C" above high "C" going for 500 miles down into the center of the Earth. Apparently this guy just broke up laughing like crazy, and he said, yeah, he liked that. The nurse who was reading it happened to know that I had once had some problems with Barbra Streisand. (I used to sing for a living, and she and I used to work in the same club in New York, and she stiffed me for twenty-one bucks when they passed the hat, and it was my money. Years later I was asked to rewrite the screenplay of "Star Spangled Girl" for her, although she never did the film, Sandy Duncan did. I went over to Paramount, and there we were in her huge dressing room, you know, in doors in the soundstage, and my agent was there, and the producer, Howard Koch, and we were talking a lot of bread. I mean we were talking a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars to rewrite the screenplay, and she came walking in and she was bad-mouthing her co-star because he had been better in the scene of "On A Clear Day..." which they were shooting. That's essentially what it was all about. She screamed he was up-staging her, but that wasn't the case. He was just good, and she *dreck*. She was indulging that same kind of bitchiness that she had had years before, and I just flashed on it, and I said, "Besides, I don't want to write this shitty movie, and this bitch owes me twenty-one dollars," and I just stalked out of there. I gave up a hundred and twenty some thousand dollars because of twenty-one bucks.)

So the nurse told this dude the story of that, and he laughed and laughed and said, "Yeah, revenge. Ellison's getting his revenge on Barbra Streisand in that story," which is exactly what I was doing. And he starts talking about revenge all of a sudden. He's talking to the nurse and he suddenly let slip that the reason he's been trying to commit suicide is because he and his sister had had some kind of a sex thing going, and the sister had been a suicide prone type who had, in fact, finally done the dive off the Golden Gate bridge, and it fucked-up this dude's mind so much, because how do you top that? How do you top doing a bro die off the Golden Gate bridge, right? He was furious because she had done it, and it had messed his mind completely. But this was the first breakthrough. It was the first time this guy had ever talked about it to this nurse. Maybe something else would have done it and he would have spilled the information, but she was my story. Now, how the hell would I know when I write a story that a little thing that I'm getting my jelly for, is some day going to help some other guy break loose and get back his head?

But to answer your question (and this is a long way around) the things I know are just a lot of different things, most of which are probably valueless. There may be a few nuggets there, but everybody sees through their own eyes, and an individual vision should never be lost, no matter how banal it may be. So when I write my work to get out, it's because some of it may be of value to somebody; and I want the shot.

That's the other thing, the other part. That's my ego, goddammit. What I do I want to do for people to read, so give me the chance. I'm not saying, hey, I want to make as much money as Harold Robbins, or hey, I want to be as famous as Ernest Hemingway, or any of that. What I'm saying is, give me the chance to be, I mean, I don't want equality, I just want freedom. Freedom and equality are sworn and mutual enemies. I don't give a shit for *equal*. I mean, all this stuff of *equal* is nonsense, because people are not equal. That may be an elitist kind of phrase, but that's the truth. I'm sorry, but there are an awful lot of people in this world who are dumber than shit, and they're dumber than I am. There are an awful lot of people who are incredibly smarter than I am. I'm running into them constantly. But I just want the free opportunity to hit my peek, whatever it may be, and I also wish it for everybody else.

That's what I was talking about on the Snyder show in terms of television. They have it locked up in such a way that you cannot do the best you can do. You've got to come down to a level of mediocrity so that you appeal to all the monkeys, and I don't want to appeal to monkeys. I want to appeal to people who will want to work their brains a little.

THIS MAY NOT BE WORTH ANYTHING, BUT DO YOU HEAR IDEAS? DO YOU SEE IDEAS? DO YOU FEEL THEM?

You're asking me to answer a question that even Aristotle couldn't answer. What is the nature of creativity? I don't know. Ideas come to me in very strange ways. Linkages of totally random objects. I'll give you another "for instance." I can explain better in anecdote than I can in theory. I'm very shy on theory, which is why I hate colleges because they teach nothing but theory, and then they can't do it when the time comes.

One day in New York City, I was walking up the street with a friend of mine, Max Katz. We we're going to a Truffaut film on something like Madison Avenue. As we're walking along the street I look at the curb, and there's a car that has been there for God knows how long. It had been ransacked, savaged, and it's up on blocks and they've taken the wheels, and the hood is opened up and they took out the parts of the engine to

somebody could pirate and use. It was just really stripped down, and I flashed on it. I don't know why, but when I saw that, it was, to me, like the desecration of Egyptian tombs. Now that starts a chain of thoughts in my mind. Okay, here is a corpse of a sacred body that has been defiled. Now, wouldn't it be funny if the curses on Egyptian tombs (such as, "Curse be all who enter here.") were on cars, too? That cars had a curse on them, too? If there was a god of automobiles, and it got even with people who desecrated them. Now you start to think. You say, well how does life come to be? Well whenever there is enough energy in one place, zap it's life! It's sort of the big bang theory. Okay, so now there's more cars than there are people, for Christ's sake, and whenever there's that large a majority of anything, they must have a god. If they've got a god, they've got a society, and they've got totems and all that. And that was the beginning of a story I did called "Corpse." That's how an idea comes to me.

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT ART IS ITS OWN JUDGMENT, OR IS IT A CASE OF COMPARATIVE JUDGMENT?

I don't even know what that means.

COMPARATIVE JUDGMENT. DOES IT SELL?

Whether something sells or not is a yardstick, because it means that it strikes a sufficiently universal chord that someone else can perceive in it what you perceived in it. So in a way, that's a very accurate judgment. When it's an editor, it's an even better judgment because there's an editor who is trained, not

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"I don't want equality, I just want freedom. Freedom and equality are sworn and mutual enemies. I don't give a shit for equality, man. I mean, all this stuff of *equal* is nonsense, because people are *not* equal... I just want the free opportunity to hit my peak, whatever it may be, and I also wish it for everybody else."

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by any great schooling, but just by having done it. An editor will read twenty, thirty, forty manuscripts a day, and you'll be able to perceive at least a level of craft, if not of expertise, or a level of intelligence. But there will be something at least that will say that this is worth looking at. So when an editor does that, that's a very good judgment. Then, when a lot of readers read it and say, hey, yeah, wow, that really does it. Like my story, "Repent, Harlequin! Said the Ticktockman." That's a very meaningful story for me, because it pertains directly to my life. A lot of people have read the story, and its been anthologized in God knows how many college textbooks, so I know that there's a universal thing in there that is of some value to people. It says the same thing to everybody. That's a comparative judgment that I'll accept. But when it gets right down to it, I mean the bottom line, I don't give a shit if anybody likes anything I write. I only owe one allegiance, and that's to the material.

THAT'S THE ARTIST SPEAKING.

Exactly. When I sit down to work, I'm working for me. I'm in a race with myself. I don't want to beat Larry Niven, or Phil Farmer, or Ernest Hemingway, or Virginia Woolf. I'm not in competition with any other writer. I'm in competition with Ellison. The Ellison who has existed up until that moment. I want to see if I can be better than that Ellison, and if I can be, then I win. But if I'm not up to my own material, if I'm not up to the challenge, then I lose. I try to spend as much of my writing time winning as I can. I guess that's the answer.

THE THING THAT INTERESTS ME IN THAT, IS THAT YOU'RE COMPETING WITH YOURSELF, RATHER THAN WITH SOMEONE ELSE. YOU'RE SAYING, "I AM MY OWN JUDGE, I KNOW MYSELF AS I AM, I'VE BEEN HONEST WITH MYSELF, I'VE LOOKED MYSELF IN THE DARK MIRROR AND IT DOESN'T SCARE ME ANY MORE." TO ME YOU'RE ALMOST SAYING THAT ART IS ITS OWN JUDGE, WITH YOU BEING THE CREATIVE IDEA THAT COMES THROUGH YOU.

Art is certainly its own reward. There is no greater reward I can get from anybody, not if they paid me a million and a half dollars for a story. There is no joy that I could get that equals the joy when I finish writing a story. Man, I'm God! I have electric bolts coming out of my hands! I'm ninety-two feet tall, for Christ's sake! I could lift my house and carry it to the other side of town. There's nobody who can give me that.

A GUEST QUESTION. KEITH LAUMER WAS INTERVIEWED BY TOM WEBB, ONE OF OUR NEWS PEOPLE, AND TOM SAID THAT LAUMER CALLED YOU THE WORST KIND OF OBSCENITY; A PIECE OF SHIT.

I can answer the Laumer thing very easily. Keith Laumer and I were very close friends for awhile. Keith is a man who, when his writing is good, is very, very good. He's a very commercial writer a lot of the time, and there's nothing wrong with that. He writes good adventure novels when he's into that bag. On other occasions, when he's written something he really wanted to write, he's a superior writer. I did an introduction to one of his books, NINE BY LAUMER, and we were very, very close friends. But Keith was always a man who was very intolerant of people's weaknesses. He could not tolerate it. He was a very rigid man who was totally inflexible about people who drank, or people who doped, or people who had personal problems they couldn't handle. It was a very non-human way of thinking about it. Well, then Keith had a stroke and it paralyzed him on one side of his body, and he became so bitter and vicious...He was always bitter and vicious, but at least he knew that people wouldn't put up with it, because he was a tall, good looking man, and a talented man, and he knew he had to carry out that facade. But then he was stricken. It was a kind of, well, I don't believe in God, but it was a kind of heavenly judgment against him. Here was a man who was intolerant of people who had infirmities and weaknesses, and suddenly he was reduced to being a cripple. He became monstrous to his friends, and many of us went a long way...(Running numbers about "how good I was to somebody" and "how they maltreated me" and that shit is really dead-ass time.) All I can say is that his friends all drifted away from him finally. Not immediately, but after a couple years of constant abuse. Well, one of the things that he did, and I've never said this in public before, but I feel that if Keith is going to call me that on the air, then I'm going to lay it right back on him.

I did one of five stories that was in a book Laumer edited called FIVE FATES, and it made a lot of money. Keith stole that money from us. He stole it from me, Frank Herbert, Poul Anderson and Gordon Dickson. He took all the money that came in. The story is that, well, he was away at a doctor or something and his daughter was taking all of his checks and putting them in the bank, and she didn't know, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But he came back and he would have seen which checks went in, and he would have known where they came from, and he knew goddamn well that it was a five way deal and each of us was supposed to get a share of the royalties. Well, years went by, the book went into book club, it went into paperback, and none of us ever got a dime. Finally, a few of us got a little twitchy about it so we called Keith's agent, who is also my agent. I called him and I said, Bob, isn't there some money? Bob went through his files and found out that Keith owed us each about six thousand dollars. Now, you see the bad part is that Keith was a friend. If he'd needed that six thousand dollars, all he had to say was, hey, I need some bread. Hey Keith, keep it man; when you get it, send it back to me. That's what you do for friends. But he didn't.

He stole the fucking money. Then I politely wrote him and said, Keith, listen, you just sold DEADFALL for an awful lot of bread. You got something like twenty, thirty thousand dollars. How about you cleaning up this debt? No answer. I wrote him again. No answer. Then I heard from other sources that he was referring to me as "that little kike from the west coast." And that's the basis of him calling me a piece of shit.

So what I finally did was stop sending him his money on his story in DANGEROUS VISIONS, and also a story we did together in PARTNERS IN WONDER. I just held up his royalties on them, and I'm crediting it against what he owes me. (I've got very straight bookkeeping, down to the penny what he owes me.) I send him a letter each time I send out the royalties on DANGEROUS VISIONS. Any writer who ever wrote for DANGEROUS VISIONS, or AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS, will tell you that they made a fortune off that goddamn book. When I get money in, I disperse it immediately, and every time a dispersal goes out, Keith doesn't get a check. Keith gets a little accounting. Such as, "You owed me $5,114.00. You've paid back $1,313.00, and you owe me this much." When that's cleaned up, if there's no more money that has come in on FIVE FATES that he hasn't stiffed me for, I will be very happy to start sending him his royalties again.

Now, if he wants to call me a piece of shit, I'd much rather be called a piece of shit than "that little kike from the west coast," because that just points up what a bad man he is. I don't mean Keith any harm, I just don't want anything to do with Keith any more. He's a guy who went sour, and when somebody goes sour, you've got to cut him loose.

THAT WAS SORT OF A TWO PART QUESTION BECAUSE TOM ALSO MENTIONED THAT IN INTERVIEWS HE'D HAD WITH SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS, SUCH AS ASIMOV, THAT THE WORD "OBSCENITY" WAS OFTEN USED IN REFERENCE TO PEOPLE OR THINGS THAT FRUSTRATED THEM.

You mean the word "shit"?

NO, "OBSCENITY."

Obscenity. Well, I don't really do that very much. I mean, if somebody's a piece of shit, I say, hey, that's a piece of shit. Obscenity's a nice word, but if you're going to use it, you should use it on something out of Lovecraft like, "The thing that came up from the earth was a hideous obscenity."

About the Laumer thing. I didn't put the knife in the guy. I didn't do it. But I can't let it ride. If I were a really good human being I would say, "Well, Keith is entitled to say what he wants. He's a nice man." But it's not true. Keith acts like a cranky shit. Keith makes rotten remarks and he shouldn't, but the bottom line of it is that I really mean Keith no harm. I have nothing to do with Keith. If I had a wish, and I didn't wish for something more important like having the war in Angola stopped, it would be that tomorrow Keith Laumer would be whole and hale and hearty. Or maybe not even that. Maybe that Keith would find peace with himself, so that all of his friends could come back and be friends with him again the way we were. But truly, I mean Keith no harm. He should live and be well. I hope he finds happiness. I just don't want him around me. I'm sorry he said that about me on the air.

YOU'VE DESCRIBED LIFE AS BEING A SERIES OF VIOLENT CONFRONTATIONS.

Well, confrontations. To a greater or lesser degree violent, is what I think I said. But yes, confrontations. That's all they really are. When you go in the grocery store to buy something, and you want a carton of cottage cheese, that's a confrontation. Do you want the cottage cheese with pineapple? Do you want large curd? Do you want the small? That's a confrontation. You've got to relate to somebody. That's not a particularly violent one unless the clerk's had a really crummy day, then maybe you've got a violent kind. But that's exactly what life is. It is a confrontation from morning 'till night. It's a confrontation with yourself. With the people around you, or with your society, or just with nature. Thinking of it as that doesn't mean that you have to think of yourself as being at war. It's just that you have to understand that the stance is one of readiness, of understanding. That you must inter-relate. That you've got to get something across to them and they've got to get something across to you. It's a series of communications problems. It's a semantic embroglio. That's what life is. Confrontation. People always talk about it. "There's a *confrontation* between the demonstrators and the police." That's a lot of BS. If there's no confrontation, then the police win, and the system wins. If you don't take an electric current and run it into that jelly, then that jelly is going to stay jelly all the rest of its life. Confrontation seems to me a very worthwhile and worthy thing.

"There is no joy that I could get that equals the joy I get when I finish writing a story. Man, I'm God! I have electric bolts coming out of my hands! I'm ninety-two feet tall, for Christ's sake!"

DO CONFRONTATIONS NEED BE VIOLENT TO PRESERVE YOUR PERSONAL INTEGRITY? CAN YOU KEEP YOUR IDEALS FUNCTIONING IN THE WORLD WITHOUT BEING VIOLENT?

Yeah, you can. But I think it goes back to the meaning of the word "violence." When I say violent, I don't necessarily mean punching out.

OKAY, YOU WALK IN FOR THE COTTAGE CHEESE. YOU MAKE A DECISION, AND YOU GO TO THE GUY AND HE SAYS OKAY.

Now that's a confrontation with no electrical charge in it. You've immediately communicated the flow of message. It was very clear. A very low level message. I want that. Can I have that? I will give you this money. Yes, you will have that. There's no problem there.

Now, if on the other hand you walk in and say, "I want the cottage cheese I bought yesterday."

"What kind was that?"

"Well, I don't know. It came in a red thing. I didn't really notice."

"Well, c'mon," he says, "I gotta' know what kind it was."

"Well, how many do you have in red?"

"Well, I got six in read."

"Well, let me take a look at them."

"Hey, I haven't got all day to fuck around with you."

Then you've got a little higher confrontation because the level of communication is lower, so the communication violence level is higher. That's a corollary. The lower the level of communication, the higher the level of violence in the confrontation.

When you say can you manage to preserve your integrity in these confrontations without getting violent, I believe a lot of the time you can. What most people do is they get in a confrontation and they are really afraid of getting into it, of getting into a situation where they aren't understood because there's rejection involved and all that kind of nasty stuff, and so they back off.

With a writer, when he backs off, such as when he's talking to a network flunky, and the guy says, "Well, I like this a lot, but why don't we turn this from a love story into a mass murder?" And the writer says, "What?" And the guy says, "Well, that's the only way we're going to give you the money and that's the only way the network is going to film it." Well now, there are different kinds of writers. Some will say, yeah, okay, I can do that, and then he'll take the idea and change it to satisfy someone else's idea, which means that there was absolutely no communication. So whatever it was the dude wrote, he didn't write it well enough, or the guy who read it didn't perceive it will enough so that they're talking at cross-purposes. They're like trains crossing each other.

On the other hand, there's a writer like me. I'll say, "What are you talking about you imbecile? I'm not going to do that. This is a love story. It's not a mass murder story. If you want to do a mass murder story, you hire me and I'll do a mass murder story for you. I love doing mass murder stories, but this one isn't that."

Then you've got a confrontation, and you've got potential violence, usually verbal violence because those schmucks are not going to pick up their fist because you'd put them through a window.

DO YOU FIND YOURSELF SOMEWHAT THE WAY MICHELANGELO WAS REPRESENTED? THAT IS, IN THE FRUSTRATION BETWEEN THE ARTIST AND THE ACCOUNTANT, SUCH AS THE GUY WHO MAKES THE PROGRAMMING DECISIONS IN THE NETWORKS SUCH AS YOU WERE JUST MENTIONING?

I identify with Michelangelo very strongly. There's much to be said on both sides. There's the merchant who is paying for this work and goddamn well wants it in his own lifetime. On the other hand, there is the artist who says, "No, the work takes precedence over your puny needs; your schedules." No matter what it is, when you get an assignment to do a television movie or a motion picture, they always want it two days before you got the assignment. They haven't had it for all of eternity before you got there, and now all of a sudden they need it. They've just gotta' have it. They're over schedule. They pre-schedule. They go ahead of things. It's a matter of living up to the Ticktockman. It's that Ticktockman syndrome that we've gotta' do everything now now now, and they're not willing to wait.

An artist, or even someone who isn't an artist, but who is just interested in the quality and the integrity of his work, cannot let them bug him that way. They just can't do it. I'm working on a screenplay upstairs in my mother's apartment here, and it's a week overdue, and I know they're back there screaming. That's why I've got a producer. That's what he's being paid for. He didn't do the creativity. He's standing there as a buffer between me and the accountants. If he can't do that well, then he's not being a good producer. Now of course I have to be cognizant of the fact that there is money involved. Money is time and all that bullshit, but I can't think of money being nearly as important as the creation of a fine piece of art.

EARLIER YOU SAID THAT YOU'RE VERY JEALOUS OF YOUR TIME. WHY, THEN, WOULD YOU WASTE PRECIOUS TIME ARGUING WITH SOME NERD WHO DOESN'T CARE ENOUGH TO WALK OVER AND SAY, "WELL, HERE'S THE SIX COTTAGE CHEESES." WHY WOULD YOU WASTE TIME WITH HIM? WHY NOT JUST WALK IN, MAKE YOUR DECISION, AND WASTE AS LITTLE TIME WITH HIM AS POSSIBLE?

Okay, I have given some thought to that. I do waste time in that respect on a lot of things. When I get a vicious letter from somebody sometimes, like: *You commie symp fag pinko kike nigger-lover.* You know, they throw everything in they could possibly get in. Usually what I do is send them a form letter that I have. I have a number of form letters. The kind of form letter I'd send to that one is: "Dear Sir, I'd like to draw your attention to the enclosed which I received in the mail. It's quite clear that some lunatic is writing letters and signing your name to them. I think you ought to get in touch with the post office and see what you can do about it." And it stops them! I never hear from them again. But every once in awhile somebody will hit a chord in me.

"But I do waste time with an awful lot of things that are time-wasting and basically fruitless because I get angry. Because I'm irrational."

Hey, a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds. I believe Oliver Wendell Holmes said that. If it wasn't Oliver Wendell Holmes, it was one of those people with three names.

You asked why do I waste time? First of all, because I'm irrational, just like everybody else. You cut me off in traffic and I'm gonna' say, "motherfucker," give you the finger and try to ram your fender. Now, if I stopped to use my brain I'd say, what am I gonna' do, ram my car into some other schmuck's car because he cut me off? What's the matter? I'll get there just as fast. I'm just an irrational human being like everybody else. No better. No worse. I'm no nobler. Honest to God.

So why would I argue with this guy? I'd argue with this guy because he is invading my personal space with stupidity. I want what I want, goddammit. Now, if I were a better human being, I would be a lot kinder. I'd say, "Oh, excuse me sir. I didn't mean to argue. Oh, please, please forgive me."

BUT NOT SUBSERVIENT.

No, not subservient. But if he starts coming on th way, you either combat it with logic (which doesn't ge through to him anyhow), or you just say, hey, you're here to serve me. I'm here to give you my money.

But I do waste time with an awful lot of things that are time wasting and basically fruitless because I get angry. Because I'm irrational. Because I wanna' win. It's a little confrontation. The underlying thread of this, and which I think may be the lesson that you're looking for, is that unless you fight all the fights, every one of them, you never know when the important

ones are there to be fought. I've seen people around me, people in my life, my family, and I saw them avoid a lot of those confrontations. They avoided the little ones, and when the time came, when they had to put themselves on the line, they avoided the big ones. When it was necessary for their soul to be on the line, they had grown so accustomed to weaseling, had grown so facile, that now they were: "Well, why should I stop," (They're on the freeway). "That woman probably isn't dead. She was probably just underneath her car trying to fix it, and there'll be a cop along in a minute and I don't have to stop." And they go on their merry way.

Now, I'm the kind who stops. Not because I have any greater love of humanity, but just because I can do no other. There's someone who may be in distress. Okay, I've got the strength to help. That's the obligation of strength, to help those who don't have the strength. So I fight all the fights. I fight the ones that are unnecessary. I fight the ones that are necessary, and that way I don't miss any of them. It's like setting a guilty man free is less onerous to me than locking an innocent man up. That's the whole idea of justice. It's the same thing with courage and with fighting the confrontations. If you start dodging them, you never know if you've gotten so good at dodging that you can even dodge the ones that you shouldn't be dodging. I guess that's my rationale.

WOULD YOU ALSO SAY THAT PART OF YOUR RATIONALE IS THAT YOU ARE IRRATIONAL?

Oh yeah, I can't deny that. I wish to god I could say, oh, I'm a perfectly logical human being and I never make mistakes. But, god I fuck up! Oh Jesus do I fuck up! Then I have to try cleaning it up. In that way I'm sort of a personal ecologist. If I bump into someone in a crowd, I get turned into fucking Uriah Heap, man! I go, "Jesus I'm sorry! Are you okay?" I guess the reason I do that is because I see so many people who will walk down a sidewalk and just bash into people and not give a goddamn.

SINCE I'M OFFERING THIS INTERVIEW TO YOU AS A FORUM TO SAY SOME THINGS THAT YOU WANT TO SAY, I WONDER IF YOU HAVE ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR THAT YOU'D LIKE TO GET OUT INTO RADIO LAND?

When you offered me this as a forum, it was your offer. I didn't need it. When you say you need a forum, there's a kind of a prejudgment that whatever it is that I have to say is somehow significantly important. That's not so. Tom Snyder let me say pretty much anything I wanted to say.

I was on his show three times before this and people keep asking me what the hell's Snyder really like? Why they would want to know, I don't know. Morbid curiosity, I suppose. So I'd say, "How the hell do I know?" I know the man for an hour or two and he seems perfectly fine to me. He seems like a power vacuum, really. He just kind of sits there and lets whoever is doing the number fill up that vacuum. He sort of leads a little, but he's not Susskind. He doesn't try to make out what an erudite fellow he is. I had no judgment about him one way or the other, but he did do a very kind thing. In fact, it was a very very gracious thing. When I started telling a story about a certain network executive, and it was a pretty tough story, too (and it was the network that I'm doing this movie for at the moment), he managed to arrange it so that the first time he worked me on to another topic. The second time, I got right up to the point where I was going to start telling it, and he said, "We've got to take a break for commercials." He wouldn't let me tell the story because he knew goddamn well that I'd get cut off on my assignment doing this movie, and it seemed to me that he needn't have done it. I mean, if he were only after a good show, he would have gone ahead and let me cut my own throat, because I'd have made it scorched earth time, man! I don't care what I say. If I perceive it to be the truth, I'll say it. He was concerned. It was a nice thing to do, and he needn't have done it. So now when people say, "What is Tom Snyder like?" I say, he's a nice man. He may be a prick and beats his old lady, I don't know, but as far as I'm concerned, he's fine by me.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: *The story Harlan alludes to which he never told on the air involved a programmer at NBC. Harlan was approached to create a series. He was given no suggestions or ideas other than it involve Atlantis. So, without knowing what NBC wanted (because they didn't know what they wanted), Harlan created a series involving a Prince Namor type of character who is from Atlantis. When he presented it to the Network, they asked if he couldn't change it and perhaps have him be a fugitive from Atlantis and the Atlanteans are trying to hunt him down every week... Harlan exploded and accused them of trying to put David Janssen on the road again, and that it was narrow thinking like that which had NBC at the bottom of the ratings heap. There were further altercations and Harlan walked off the project. When I head Harlan tell this story at a convention in April of 1976, he stated: "Mark my words, you're still going to be seeing a series come out of NBC that has to do with Atlantis. You'll see." Several months later, "The Man From Atlantis" premiered on NBC. And now you know where it all began. ---JVH*]

ON THE SNYDER SHOW, YOU WERE COMMENTING ABOUT BUCKMINSTER FULLER TAKING FOUR HOURS TO DESCRIBE HOW THE STRAIGHT LINE CANNOT BE THE SHORTEST DISTANCE BETWEEN TWO POINTS. I DON'T KNOW BUCKMINSTER FULLER. I DON'T KNOW WHERE HE'S AT, BUT I KIND OF UNDERSTOOD IT. WAS HE A WRITER?

No, no, no. Buckminster Fuller is the man who created the geodesic dome. He's one of the great architects of all time and one of the great thinkers of our time.

THAT BLOWS MY QUESTION. MY QUESTION WAS, WOULD BUCKMINSTER FULLER BE CONCERNED ABOUT SELLING BOOKS? WOULD HE GIVE A DAMN?

Well, no. You see, that's not his area. He's done books, but that's not his area. Bucky Fuller would be concerned that he could get the money from the building commission to put up the kind of structure that he wanted to. His problem would be, somebody hires him to build a home, he goes ahead and does he design, and the guy doesn't like it. The guy might not like it because there's no bathrooms in it, which would be bad. He also might not like it because he doesn't understand the art or the logistics of the architecture or structure that Bucky Fuller would bring to it. The thing that Snyder was talking about was that Bucky Fuller wasn't good show. He didn't give a good show. He wasn't facile and quick and cute and clever like me, which is all bullshit. But I'm hip to that. I'm on to that. He asked him an involved theoretical question, "How is it that a straight line is not necessarily the shortest distance between two points?" Now, you expect Bucky Fuller to say oh, blah, blah, blah. Well, you can't answer a question like that in that way, and we are so geared in television to these dumb talk shows which people really think are the reawakening of conversation. It's nothing like that! It's dumb show, for Christ's sake. It's a lot of people getting up and feeding their egos. I'm on to that, which is what I tried to say to Snyder. Of course he got a little uptight and I said, "You look uncomfortable. You're unhappy with me." "No, no, no. Unhappy? I'm not unhappy." But he was because what I was saying was, Tom, don't take this show very seriously, and the folks out there in teevee land look, all this is bullshit. It's really really bullshit. It doesn't mean anything more than anything you would say. I am they. They are me. I am the mouth at that particular moment; that's all it is; to quote from Mel Brooks.

So Fuller probably wouldn't be concerned about

whether his books sold, but he would be concerned about being permitted to build his ideas. He would be up against the architectural establishment of people. If this were a world in which great art and great creativity were prized, we wouldn't have buildings like the ones we have all along the shore of Biscayne Bay here. I mean, there are goddamn filing cabinets for people. They're fucking inhuman. They may in some ways be functional, but they certainly are unlovely as opposed to an individual structure that a Buckminster Fuller or a Frank Lloyd Wright would build. That's where his concern would be while mine is with the establishment that has brainwashed the readership of this country into being able to buy books like Jacqueline Susann's books and Harold Robbins' books. "Oh, they're amusing. They're interesting." Yeah, they are amusing. They are interesting. That's fine if they were also reading Conrad and Dickens and Donald Westlake and all the other good things; but people don't. They go, "Oh, I read them for amusement." Then you find out that they aren't reading any goddamn thing else. They're reading Reader's Digest and Susann and that's it! And that to me is a tragedy, that the inertia which is inherent in the system (the power system, the structure) is not used to better people's existences. To uplift people's existences. To make them want more, better, cleaner, finer and more humane. Instead, what it makes them want is cheaper, faster, easier, and that's how I got into McDonald's (on the Snyder show) which is when he started whopping me. I called them McDonald's toadburgers, and Kentucky racist colonel serves you fried wombat or whatever it was, and they just cut that whole thing because they don't want to be sued. But to me, McDonald's and the Kentucky Colonel are like living totems, living symbols of this whole mediocrity thing. The deification of mediocrity.

DIDN'T YOU WRITE THE SCREENPLAY FOR "A BOY AND HIS DOG"?

Well, I wrote part of it, but it was mostly written by L.Q. Jones, the actor, who directed it. I went into block at that point as I was working on that script. The first writer's block I'd ever had. I'd been writing something like fifteen years. The machine just kind of seized up and said, hey, you need a break, you need a rest. So L.Q. finished it himself. He did a very good job with it. I understand it did very well down here.

YOU RAN FOR SEVERAL WEEKS. WAS THE ENDING YOURS?

It's the same as the story. You haven't read the story? Aha! You've revealed yourself, Dennis! How shocking! No, the movie follows the story exactly with very very minor changes. I had the above ground section get bombed out city. They shot it as a desert with Humvees in it because it would just cost too much. But other than that, the story is almost exactly the same. Some changes were made for production reasons. It's my story. The ending is exactly the way I wrote it, except that I didn't write that line, "She had good taste." I would never have written a line like that. My last line is, "Everybody knows what love is. A boy loves his dog."

I'VE NEVER YOU'VE ENJOYED THIS. I REALLY HAVE.

You reach a level of enjoyment in the interviews where after awhile you're saying pretty much the same things again. I don't like to repeat myself. I hate getting bored by people, and I hate hearing the same things that I've always heard, so when I give an answer I try to answer it however much that day's perceptions permit me to answer it from what I believed the last time I said it, which makes for some very strange interviews. Someone will interview me one year and I'll believe one thing, and then I'll learn differently in the year following, and then someone will interview me again and they'll play one another and say, "Well, that guy's lying. I mean, he's saying directly the opposite." Well, we learn better as we grow older and we get more information. They're always pillorying people for having one opinion one day and another opinion the next, and that could be waffling. It could be hypocrisy. On the other hand, it just could be that they wised up.

So I've enjoyed it. Let me put it this way. I haven't not enjoyed it. Okay? I mean, it hasn't been the most wildly happy time of my life. There are things I would much rather be doing. But as interviews go, it was a good interview. You're a good interviewer. You didn't ask me anything stupid. You'd be surprised at some of the moron things they ask me. *"Where do you get your ideas?"* Schenectady, I say. I send off to an idea service. They send me a six-pack of fresh ideas each week.

But an interview is an interview. I can never really get it through my head, I suppose, that I'm important enough, or that the things I have to say are important enough, to really be interviewed seriously.

THE REASON THAT YOU'RE IMPORTANT IS BECAUSE YOU KNOW THESE THINGS, AND THERE AREN'T ENOUGH OTHER PEOPLE WHO DO.

Is that really true, you think?

IT'S TRUE.

But most of the things I know are so goddamn simple and obvious, it seems to me. I can't understand how people don't know them. And it seems to me insulting when you say to someone, hey, it is better to be nice to people than to be mean to people, and they go, "Wow! Heavy thought!" But that isn't really a heavy thought. I'm not Diogenes.

I DON'T KNOW THE EXACT STATISTICS, BUT APPROXIMATELY 65% OF THE PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY DON'T HAVE AN ADEQUATE LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE.

There's something like five million illiterates, and six million more funtional illiterates. It's a terrifying concept that there are that many people around who just can't even write their own name, or those who can write their name aren't capable of voting properly in an election. That's the drawback of democracy, I suppose. You give the vote to the dingbats as well as the intellectuals, but then intellectuals don't have much to vote for themselves either.

I wish I knew more about things. I'm confronted more and more each day by the lack of knowledge I have. It's very frustrating. There's just whole lots of things I should know more about and I don't. I'm always afraid I'm going to make a wrong move. I go ahead and make them anyhow because you can't not make them. Any action is better than no action at all. But I always wish I knew more. I'm not trying to be humble or feel inferior, it's just, I guess, a recognition of potential space. How obscure. You're going to have to edit the shit out of this, you know.

People like to have answers. Ronald Reagan goes around and lectures at colleges, and he's got every answer. Every fucking answer! No matter what you ask him. They're not necessarily the right answers, but he's got an answer. When I go and I give a lecture (and I lecture in a lot of colleges and they pay me an enormous amount of money), someone will say to me, can you tell me why blah, blah, blah... And I'll say, hmm, ah, no, I can't, I really don't know the answer to that, and they go, what? Or someone will say to me, had you considered that you are, or that such and such is...and I hadn't considered it. And I say, wow, no, I hadn't considered that. And they go, gee, well, what do you think about it. I say, I'll have to think about it and I'll get back to you later. "When will you get back to me?" Well, I don't know, ten years from now when we meet again.

It's a perplexing universe. How's that for profundity?

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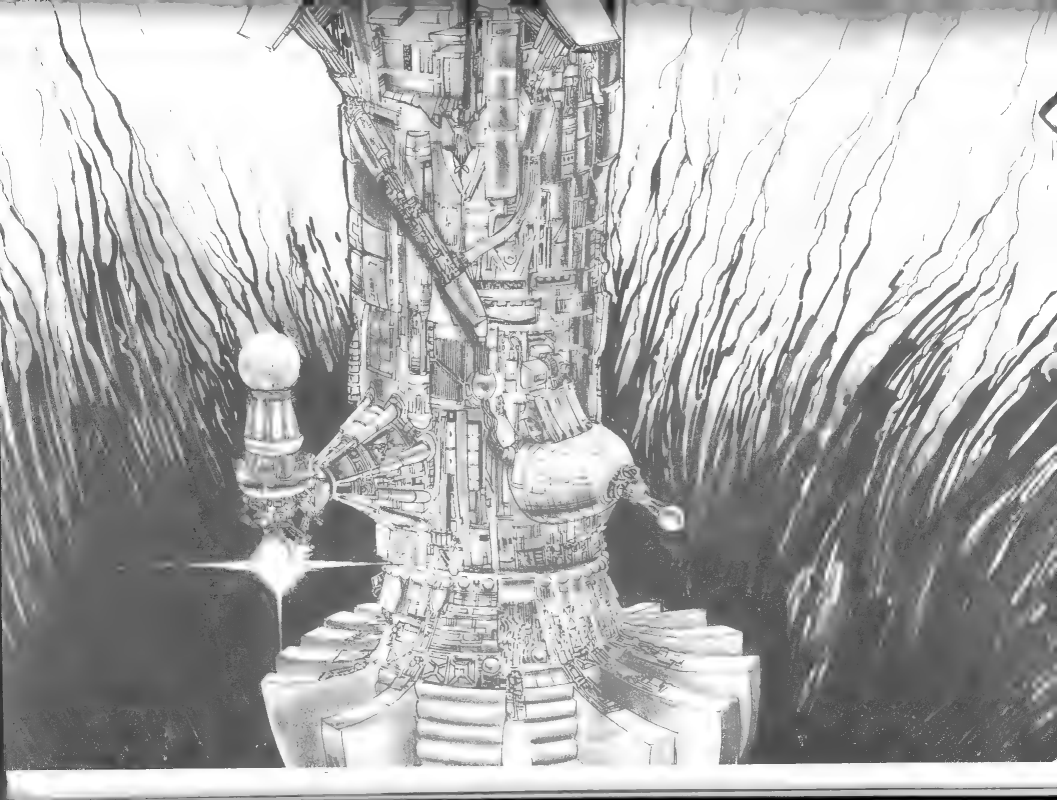

AAARGHH! HELP! THE GIANT ANT ATE MY MAIDENFORM BRA

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by Harlan Ellison

The following article will be appearing as the introduction to a book to be published by the Science Fiction Book Club in the coming months and appears here for the first time anywhere.

* * *

So I walk into this dippy film producer's office and...

Hold it, hold it! I'll talk about this book in a minute, don't bug me; I'll get to it. But first, a few words of wit and wisdom. *God*, you people are impatient.

Let me tell you about this thing that went down with the dippy film producer.

It was a few years ago. Since then I think the dude has gone on to even further moral and financial desolation with flicks about roller disco, mad bombers, bloodsucking ghouls that gum the plaque off their victims' teeth, and assassination conspiracy paranoia usually involving Lee Harvey Oswald's successful murder of Martha Washington.

But at this moment of which I speak, he was doing a lotta "sci-fi" movies. What I was doing in his office, however briefly, was trying to make a buck. I won't say I was broke; I wasn't missing any meals; I was just postponing a lot of them.

So I got a call through my agent, Marty, and I went over to Paramount to meet the dip. Walked into his office and saw framed posters of some of his bigger hits. The exact titles escape me at the moment, but they were all on the order of THE GIANT RUTABAGA THAT PERFORMED HIDEOUS OBSCENITIES ON DETROIT. (Sounds of Cheyne-Stokes breathing from the Author.)

Dip sits me down, offers me some instant coffee and non-dairy creamer than which there is nothing more likely to make a decent young man brechhh, and says he wants I should write for him this dynamite new film based on this dynamite new idea he's come up with, all outta his own widdle brain.

"What it is," he says, spraying Binaca into his gob, "is a total departure from alien menace movies."

I stare back wide-eyed, feigning interest.

"Now you'll grant me they've done all the giant ant, giant grasshopper, giant praying mantis, giant roach, giant bee, giant caterpillar movies anybody wants to see, right?"

"I'll grant you that."

"So we've got to be daring, right? Original, right? Got to come up with something fresh and provocative, right?"

"Granted. I'm talking here granted."

"Mealybugs."

From the Author, a silence akin to that found at the bottom of the Cayman Trench.

Time passes. Dip stares with delight at seemingly awestruck expression of confusion on what is left of face of Author.

"Beg pardon?"

"Mealybugs."

"Why did I know you were going to say that again... can this be *deja vu*?"

"Doncha get it? Mealybugs...the greatest ecological disaster ever to confront puny Mankind!"

"Entomological."

"What?"

"Entomological, not ecological. Entomological is bugs, ecological is trees and shrubs and like that."

"That's what I *mean*!" he chirrups, bounding up from his seat and capering around the office. "Trees, shrubs, dichondra, crab grass...all of it, eaten up by giant mealybugs."

Jeeezus, I thought. *Surely I will go mad.*

"Listen," I said, "far be it from me to double-team your nervous system, but that has *got* to be the most idiotic idea anybody *ever* came up with for a movie. Haven't you ever heard of the square cube law?"

Boy, that did it. Just hit them suckers with heavy weight science stuff and they fold. Dip looks at me like an all-Pro wingback caught in the locker room chewing on Norforms. "The, uh, square cube law...?"

"Look: it's simple. One of the basic laws of the Universe. *Everybody* knows it. When you increase the size of something like, say, an ant..."

"Or a mealybug?"

"...or a mealybug, the area changes as squared, but the volume changes as cubed. That means if you take a sixty foot ant...or a sixty foot mealybug...and you increase its strength a thousand times, you *also* increase its weight a *million* times."

Don't correct me if I've got it wrong. I was talking to a nitwit. It's the *idea* that counts.

"So that would mean..."

I looked at him.. He *still* didn't get it. "That would mean that the thing would collapse of its own weight. It'd just faw down go boom and lie there 'til the sun rotted it or a sixty-eight foot bird ate the remains."

"Well, how about a sixty-eight foot..."

"Forget it," I said.

So Dip looks at me, and he says, "Okay, okay, so you don't like that idea. Don't worry about it, I've got a million of 'em. Just go on over there and pick one you like." And he points to an armoire in the corner that is absolutely bulge-overflowing with old science fiction pulp magazines from the Thirties and Forties. I look at this creep the way Simon Wiesenthal would look at an engraved invitation to attend the Adolf Eichmann Memorial Testimonial Dinner and I hear myself screaming, "You can't *do* that!"

"Why the hell not?"

"*BECAUSE IT'S CALLED STEALING, YOU FLOUNDERING FEEP! IT'S CALLED PLAGIARISM, GONIFF BEHAVIOR, THEFT, PILF-*

...T, *YOU CREPUSCULAR CRO-MAGNOID!"*

...pins are standing out in my temples. I'm biting ...holding off the desk. Spittle is raining all over ...ug pile carpeting. But now *he's* getting ticked ...at me.

...addaya mean I can't do it? Who's to know? Who's ...stop me?"

...'ll know, you slushfaced wimpyburger! *I'll* know! ...ll tell every writer I can reach; I'll take a ...ster & Kleiser billboard on Sunset; I'll take ads in ... and the *Reporter*; I'll tell Nader; we'll bring ...ab action suit, you lox!"

...an did not understand that all those stories were ...ublic property, like a reference library. Saw ...thing wrong with stealing other people's ideas. ...nthics of a...of a...of a goddamn mealybug!

...an threw me out of his office. Last year he made ...remake of a giant aphid movie he'd done back in ...e Fifties.

...e's still around. They're *all* still around. ...ept now they have budgets that make *Cleopatra* look ...e Little Theatre.

...rely I will go mad.

...w now, about this book. This is a nice book. ...mill, what the hell did you *expect* me to say: ...is is a wretched piece of useless trash cobbled up ...desperate Jim Wnoroski trying to make a semi- ...timate buck? This is a second-rate conglomeration ...f hack stories from which were made movies that would ...ver have served the artistic commonweal had they ...en cut up for mandolin picks in the editing room? ...e Wnoroski is too cheap to pay decent reprint money ...r terrific stories like Daniel Keyes's "Flowers for ...ger non" from which they made *Charly*, so he had to ...k up for *dreck* like "A Boy and His Dog?" Is *that* ...at you want me to say?)

...wever. I tell you: never!)

...What we have here is a splendid idea that Jim's been ...ying to hustle for six years. No one wanted to hear ...bout it. But now, with great cinematic artistry like ...k Rogers, *Battlestar Ponderosa*, *Starcrash*, *Close ...counters, Star Trek: The Motionless Picture* and that ...ther one--oh, you know the one I mean, the one with ...e cuddly robots and the real clean blond kid who looks ...ke a Mormon with a light-saber, *you* know--with all ...f those filmic answers to the burning question "What ...ill replace NO-Doz?" with all of those bursting across ...he silver screens of America, Wnoroski's is an idea ...hose time has come at last!

A book full of the original stories from which ...assic (and not-so-classic) science fiction movies ...ve been made. Just chock full of peachykeen fiction ...om some of the most adept hands in the genre--Campbell, ...Hamley, Kuttner, Bradbury, Clarke, Ellison--all right, ...ve out of six ain't bad. And fair to bursting with ...ull-page, black-and-white stills showing actors remembered ...nly by Miniver Cheevy or stoned-out nostalgia buffs, ...howling at one another in horror, or dyspepsia, one ...never really knows which.

...ere it all is, once again! The Golden Days of Sci- ...Films! Men turned into flies, alien saviors with ...big waterheads, deranged drivers centerpunching inno- ...ent pedestrians, loony robots, mad scientists, ...Neanderthal archeologists, enigmatic machinery, big sea ...monsters. Ohmigod, be still my throbbing heart!

...ve been paid by Nelson Doubleday Books, through ...e good offices of Jim Wnoroski, who pretends to be my ...end and paid Bradbury four times what I got, to ...rite this introduction, extolling the virtues of this ...ght overpriced anthology. I have allowed my good ...en-mail nature to be corrupted for a paltry pittance to ...ell you that John Campbell's "Who Goes There?" is the ...story from which they made the film that launched the ...career of James Arness as a screaming carrot. I have ...one on the block for a few clams to point out that ...Hamley's "Seventh Victim" was the terrific yarn from ...which a bunch of Italians made a movie most notable in memory as the vehicle in which Ursula Andress wore a brassiere that featured D-cups outfitted with .38 Police Positives. I have sold my pottage for a mess of spondoolix to advise you that Bradbury's "The Foghorn" was vasectomized as a genuine beast from 20,000 fathoms.

You need this, right? Like an extra set of elbows you need this.

If the first anthologization of Kuttner's "Dr. Cyclops" in thirty-some years doesn't turn you on; if the first of the three Cal Meacham novelettes by Ray Jones that became *This Island Earth* doesn't pique your sense of wonder; if reliving the terror of Campbell's "Who Goes There?" and if standing in respect at how well Harry Bates's classic "Farewell to the Master" has held up over forty years doesn't provide your money's worth, then nothing I say here will do it for you.

What I'm trying to convey is that this is a *nice* book.

It's get a few items you can't find anywhere else, like Ivar Jorgenson's "Deadly City" which is a helluva lot better story than it ever was as a movie; Paul Fairman's little snapper "Cosmic Frame," which appears here not too long after dear Paul Fairman died, which makes me sad but pleased that his work is still around, not only because he was an editor who kept duds like me and Silverberg and Garrett and Slesar and Milt Lesser eating during the lean days of the Fifties; and Langelaan's "The Fly" that made such a helluva impact when it was first published in *Playboy* lo those many years ago, and all the rest of us scrambled with hungry eyes at a guy selling a sf/horror story to the best market in the country while the rest of us were writing our buns off for a penny-a-word.

It's a *nice* book, with pictures and comments and just a tiny bulge of tongue in cheek. It ain't a book that will revolutionize the world or send the masses out into the streets with pitchforks. It is simply an intelligently put-together, very catchy idea that Wnoroski (no matter *how* he anagrams his name for the *goyim*) has assembled with deep affection and considerable knowledge of film fantasy.

It's a book that should have been done a long time ago by Jim, but at least it's nice to have it now. Because it makes very obvious some painful object lessons about how Hollywood looks at science fiction, and what it does to the written word.

They are object lessons many readers would prefer to ignore. But as long as you *do* ignore those lessons, you'll have to sit through more hours of dreary pyrotechnics like *The Black Hole* and *Marooned* and *Damnation Alley* and all the rest of those zombie imitations of *Star Wars*, which turkey you already know I'm not too knocked-out by, even though it gets you angry that I don't wroship at the same altar you do.

Nonetheless. It cannot be that you do not perceive the qualitative difference between *Star Wars* and films that knocked your socks off like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* or *2001: A Space Odyssey*. I refuse to believe you don't perceive the yawning gap between them.

What I'm suggesting here, and what is borne out by the stories in this book and the films they became, is that a book as good as Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* does not have to turn up as wretchedly on film as *The Omega Man*.

The stuff in this book, for the large part, is excellent. Clever, original, thought-provoking. Some of the film transmogrifications are likewise. You know which ones. But the good stories in this book that became dog movies point a very significant direction that leads into artistic waste and foolishness.

And readers like you, who bought this book because you love intelligent and uplifting science fiction, who also love intelligent and uplifting sf movies, are the word-of-mouth underground that can make film producers leave that dark road to dumbness and take a detour toward films that live up to your finest dreams.

Which will put producers like the Dip, with his giant mealybugs, out of business.

"BASILISK" AND "SOLDIER", TWO ENCOUNTERS WITH WAR.

> "Perhaps, when we remember wars, we should take off our clothes and paint ourselves blue and go on all fours all day long and grunt like pigs. That would surely be more appropriate than noble oratory and shows of flags and well-oiled guns."
> --Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., CAT'S CRADLE

Last summer, when I chose "Basilisk" and "Soldier" as the two stories I wanted Harlan to allow me to have adapted into comic strips for this issue, I wondered if perhaps someone might think that by choosing these two stories I was trying to belabor a point, because war seemed so distant then, like a dying echo or a fading memory. But sadly that is no longer the case.

Now the fire art of sabre-rattling has returned to the world with disquieting swiftness and the points in the world where a major conflict could erupt seem to be growing all the time. When non-violent sanctions are taken to protest human rights violations, the arm-chair warriors twitch with impatience and wonder why they don't hear the sounds of gunfire or see the counts of American bodies on their nightly news. They want *somebody* to do *something* so that they'll feel satisfied. War as orgasm. Not that *they* will do anything themselves, mind you. That's not their *job*. They're capable of doing nothing more heroic than beating up an Iranian protestor while the police stand by and interfere only after the Iranian has been beaten up enough (and if seeing that on the news made you feel good, you're as bad as any of them.)

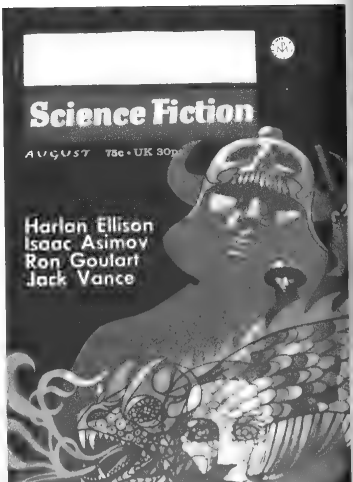
We forget. Everybody forgets, and nobody learns. The only positive thing I've seen happen in months is that *finally* the anti-draft protests are starting up. Thank God the Sixties aren't completely dead after all. All too soon, too many people forget the horrors connected with war, and they want to start everything all over again. War is a great deal more than just the good guys versus the bad guys. They forget how it can affect them personally. They forget the veterans who returned from our last war crippled emotionally and physically. We are still reaping that harvest and now they're thundering for a new crop of soldiers to be plucked from the ranks of our youth to become tomorrow's battlefield fodder.

I really didn't think I'd see it happen again. Just because the name of the battlefield isn't Viet Nam, it's supposed to be okay. *But this is different*, they say. No, no it isn't. Not to the dead it won't be different, and not to those who mourn them. They'll still shoot and stab each other and we'll slip further backward down the road to civilization thinking it's different because we'll fight conventional, non-atomic wars.

It isn't *that* different. We can still destroy things just as terribly. The fire-bombing of Dresden in WWII killed 130,000 people. The A-bomb dropped on Hiroshima killed 87,000.

As Harlan so eloquently says in his introductions which follow, these stories are to remind us what war really is, and what it does to us even if we never pick up a gun. Its very existence exacts a terrible price on all who survive, because no one escapes unscathed.

The introductions which follow to "Basilisk" and to "Soldier" are by Harlan Ellison and were excerpted from previously published sources.



"Basilisk" concerns itself, thematically, with the valid limits of institutionalized patriotism, with the limits of self-sacrifice a soldier should set for himself, with the fickle nature of the national pride a soldier serves as opposed to that nation's treatment of the *person* upon his return from battle, and most specifically how love of country can be turned to hate when the soldier receives not approbation for his efforts but ostracism and reproachment.

The story in no way deals with class. Patriotism cuts across class lines. The people in the story are obviously *classless*; they are simply the residents of a small town. An *entire* small town is arrayed against the protagonist, Lance Corporal Vernon Lestig.

"Basilisk" was first conceived in 1960, because "Basilisk" is based on Francis Gary Powers, the U-2 pilot shot down while spying on Russia by means of a high-altitude over-flight. It is based on the treatment that Powers received when he returned to his home town in Tennessee: hatred, ostracism, social and economic boycott, the debasement of his family forcing them to move away, forcing Powers into anonymity and a new identity. I was appalled at the bestiality of people considered "good citizens." I could not understand how they could applaud his having been a spy, then revile him for not having killed himself with the cyanide cap in his hollow back tooth. I began thinking about how far "patriotism" should take someone. To his own death to protect an illegal act?

Well, I worked on the idea, trying to codify my thoughts in terms of a contemporary story, but it didn't work. The closest I came to setting it down in the Sixties was a story treatment for the *Route 66* television series, on which I was working in 1962-3. But it didn't work. So I set it aside. When the Viet Nam War began, the story came back to me. I need not go on at length

Many of my stories in magazines have been translated into scripts. Some of them work very nicely. The one that follows is an example. It was a statement of anti-war sentiments on my part, and when Hans Stefan Santesson originally bought it for Fantastic Universe in 1957, he gave me ninety-one dollars for it. That was a pile of money for me at the time. In 1964 when I rewrote and adapted the story for television, I received five thousand dollars. Times change, media change, but my beliefs about the senseless stupidity of war remain unchanged. Though I served my two years in the Army, were I called up now, I would refuse to serve. I'm afraid I would have to go to jail like Tommy Rodd, a boy I've never met, but for whom I feel a great brotherhood. He literally follows the philosophy of Thoreau that "he serves the State best who opposes it the most." Were I in his position, I would try to be as heroic, as brave. But as I am not, the best I can do is sit on my fat ass, write my stories, take their five grand, and hope that out there in Knobtwiddlesville, The Great Unwashed who would shriek in horror if two lovely people fornicated with pleasure on their TV screen, but who purr with patriotic delight when their sons are decorated in Viet Nam for miscalculating and dropping "a little defoliation" on US troops or amber skinned babies in school yards, will one day soon come to their senses, rise up in their wrath, and send all the face-saving polititions scuttling to their holes rather than allow them to continue senseless warfare in remote corners of a globe that has come to think of us in terms of atrocities and aggression. Some of this I tried to say in the story that follows. But for those who need ready categorizations, to ignore the unsettling remarks of others, I am not now nor have I ever been anything Robert Welch and his Birchies would consider subversive. I'm just a guy like many out there, who has come to maturity realizing God ain't necessarily on our side. In point of fact, I don't think he can ever be on the side of the "Soldier."

BASILISK

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What though the Moor the basilisk has slain
And pinned him lifeless to the sandy plain,
Up through the spear the subtle venom flies,
The hand imbibes it, and the victor dies.

—Lucan: *Pharsalia*
(Marcus Annaeus Lucanus,
A.D. 39-65)

Returning from a night patrol beyond the perimeter of the [illegible], Lance Corporal Vernon Lestig fell into a trail trap set by hostiles. He was bringing up the rear, covering the patrol's withdrawal from recently overrun sector eight, when he fell too far behind and lost the bush track. Though he had no way of knowing he was paralleling the patrol's trail, thirty yards off their left flank, he kept moving forward hoping to intercept them. He did not see the pungi stakes set at cruel angles, frosted with poison, tilted for top-point efficiency, sharpened to infinity.

Two set close together penetrated the barricade of his boot, the first piercing the arch and his weight driving it up and out to emerge just below the anklebone, still inside the boot, the other ripping through the sole and splintering against the fibula above the heel, without breaking the skin.

Every circuit shorted out, every light bulb blew, every drum imploded, snakes shed their skins, wagon wheels crumbled, plate-glass windows shattered, dentist drills ratcheted across nerve ends, vomit burned tracks up through throats, screams were torn, fingernails bent double dragged down blackboards, water came to a boil; lava. Nova pain. Lestig's heart stopped, lubbed, began again, stuttered; his brain went mad refusing to accept the load; all senses came to full stop; he staggered sidewise with his untouched left foot, pulling free of the pungi stakes out of the ground, and was unconscious even during the single movement; and fainted, simply gracefully fainted with the pain.

This was happening: great black gap-mawed beast padding through outer darkness toward him. On a horizonless journey through myth, coming toward the moment *before* the piercing of flesh. Lizard dragon beast with eyes of oil-slick pools, ultraviolet death colors smoking in their depths. Serpentine silk-flowing muscles sliding beneath the black hairless skin; trained sprinter from a lost land, smoothest movements of choreographed power. The never-sleeping guardian of the Path, now gentlestepping down through mists of potent barriers erected to separate men from their masters.

In that moment before boot touched the bamboo spike, the basilisk passed through the final veils of confounding time and space and dimension and thought, to assume palpable shape in the forest world of Vernon Lestig. And in the transformation was changed, altered wonderfully. The black, thick scaly hide of the death-breath dragon beast shimmered, and lightning across that prairie land, golden flashes seen quartering beyond mountain peaks, and the great creature was a thousand colored. Green diamonds burned up from the skin of the basilisk, the deadly million eyes of a nameless god. Talons gorged with the water-thin blood of insects sealed in amber from the dawn of time pulsed there. Golden jewels changing from instant to instant, shape and scent and hue . . . they were there in the tapestry mosaic of the skin picture. A delicate, subtle, gaudy flashmaze kaleidoscope of flesh, taut over massive muscled threats.

The basilisk was in the world.

And Lestig had yet to experience his pain.

The creature lifted a satin-padded paw and laid it against the points of the pungi stakes. Slowly, the basilisk relaxed and the stakes pierced the rough sensitive blackmoon shapes of the pads. Dark, steaming serum flowed down over the stakes, mingling with the Oriental poison. The basilisk withdrew its paw and the twin wounds healed in an instant, closed over and were gone.

Were gone. Bunching of muscles, a leap into the air, a caldron roiling of dark air, and the basilisk sprang up into nothing and was gone. Was gone.

As the moment came to an exhalation of end, and Vernon Lestig walked onto the pungi stakes.

It is a well-known fact that one whose blood slakes the thirst of the *vrykolakas*, the vampire, himself becomes one of the drinkers of darkness, becomes a celebrant of the master deity, becomes himself possessed of the powers of the disciples of that deity.

The basilisk had not come from the vampires, nor were his powers those of the blood drinkers. It was not by chance that the basilisk's master had sent him to recruit Lance Corporal Vernon Lestig. There is an order to the darkside universe.

He fought consciousness, as if on some cellular level he knew what pain awaited him with the return of his senses. But the red tide washer higher, swallowed more and more of his deliquescent body, and finally the pain thundered in from the blood-sea, broke in a long, curling comber and coenesthesia was upon him totally. He screamed and the scream went on and on for a long time, till they came back to him and gave him an injection of something that thinned the pain, and he lost contact with the chaos that had been his right foot.

When he came back again, it was dark and at first he thought it was night, but when he opened his eyes it was still dark. His right foot itched mercilessly. He went back to sleep, no coma, sleep.

When he came back again, it was still night and he opened his eyes and he realized he was blind. He felt straw under his left hand and knew he was on a pallet and knew he had been captured; and then he started to cry because he knew, without even reaching down to find out, that they had amputated his foot. Perhaps his entire leg. He cried about not being able to run down in the car for a pint of half-and-half just before dinner; he cried about not being able to go out to a movie without people trying not to see what had happened to him; he cried about Teresa and what she would have to decide now; he cried about the way clothes would look on him; he cried about the things he would have to say every time; he cried about shoes; and so many other things. He cursed his parents and his patrol and the hostiles and the men who had sent him here and he wanted, wished, prayed desperately that any one of them could change places with him. And when he was long finished crying, and simply wanted to die, they came for him, and took him to a hooch where they began questioning him. In the night. The night he carried with him.

They were an ancient people, with a heritage of enslavement, and so for them anguish had less meaning than the thinnest whisper of crimson cloud high above a desert planet of the farthest star in the sky. But they knew the uses to which anguish could be put, and for them there was no evil in doing so: for a people with a heritage of enslavement, evil is a concept of those who forged the shackles, not those who wore them. In the name of freedom, no monstrousness is too great.

So they tortured Lestig, and he told them what they wanted to know. Every scrap of information he knew. Locations and movements and plans and defenses and the troop strength

story by
Harlan Ellison
art by
Alex Nino

and the sophistication of armameits and the nature of his mission and rumors he'd picked up and his name and his rank and every serial number he could think of, and the street address of his home in Kansas, and the sequence of his driver's license, and his gas credit card number and the telephone number of Teresa. He told them everything.

As if it were a reward for having held nothing back, a gummed gold star placed beside his chalked name on a blackboard in a kindergarten schoolroom, his eyesight began to come back slightly. Flickering, through a haze of gray; just enough light permitted through to show him shapes, the change from daylight to darkness; and it grew stronger, till he could actually *see* for whole minutes at a time. . . then blIindness again. His sight came and went, and when they realized he could see them, they resumed the interrogations on a more strenuous level. But he had nothing left to tell; he had emptied himself.

But they kept at him. They threatened to hammer bamboo slivers into his damaged eyeballs. They hung him up on a shoulder-high wooden wall, his arms behind him, circulation cut off, weight pulling the arms from their shoulder sockets, and they beat him across the belly with lengths of bamboo, with bojitsu sticks. He could not even cry any more. They had given him no food and no water and he could not manufacture tears. But his breath came in deep, husking spasms from his chest, and one of the interrogators made the mistake of stepping forward to grab Lestig's head by the hair, yanking it up, leaning in close to ask another question, and Lestig—falling falling—exhaled deeply, struggling to live; and there was that breath, and a terrible thing happened.

When the reconnaissance patrol from the firebase actualized control of the hostile command position, when the Huey choppers dropped into the clearing, they advised Supermart HQ that every hostile but one in the immediate area was dead, that a Marine Lance Corporal named Lestig, Vernon C. 526-90-5416, had been found lying unconscious on the dirt floor of a hooch containing the bodies of nine enemy officers who had died horribly, most peculiarly, sickeningly, you've gotta see what this place looks like, HQ, jesus you ain't gonna believe what it smells like in here, you gotta see what these slopes look like, it musta been some terrible disease that could of done this kinda thing to 'em, the new Lieutentant got really sick an' puked and what do you want us to do with the one guy that crawled off into the bushes before *it* got him, his face is melting, and the troops're scared shitless and. . .

And they pulled the recon group out immediately and sent in the Intelligence section, who sealed the area with Top Security, and they found out from the one with the rotting face—just before he died—that Lestig had talked, and they medivacked Lestig back to a field hospital and then to Saigon and then to Tokyo and then to San Diego and they decided to court-martial him for treason and conspiring with the enemy, and the case made the papers big, and the court-martial was held behind closed doors and after a long time Lestig emerged with an honorable and they paid him off for the loss of his foot and the blindness and he went back to the hospital for eleven months and in a way regained his sight, though he had to wear smoked glasses.

And then he went home to Kansas.

Between Syracuse and Garden City, sitting close to the coach window, staring out through the film of roadbed filth, Lestig watched the ghost image of the train he rode superimposed over flatland Kansas slipping past outside. The mud-swollen Arkansas River was a thick, brown underline to the horizon.

"Hey, you Corporal Lestig?"

Vernon Lestig refocused his eyes and saw the wraith in the window. He turned and the sandwich butcher with his tray of candy bars, soft drinks, ham&cheese on white or rye, newspapers and *Reader's Digest*, suspended from his chest by a strap around the neck, was looking at him.

"No thanks," Lestig said, refusing the merchandise.

"No, hey, really, aren't you that Corporal Lestig—" He uncurled a newspaper from the roll in the tray and opened it quickly. "Yeah, sure, here you are. See?"

Lestig had seen most of the newspaper coverage, but this was local, Wichita. He fumbled for change. "How much?"

"Ten cents." There was a surprised look on the butcher's face, but it washed down into a smile as he said, understanding it, "You been out of touch in the service, didn't even remember what a paper cost, huh?"

Lestig gave him two nickels and turned abruptly to the window, folding the paper back. He read the article. It was a stone. There was a note referring to an editorial, and he turned to that page and read it. People were outraged, it said. Enough secret trials, it said. We must face up to our war crimes, it said. The effrontery of the military and the government, it said. Coddling, even ennobling traitors and killers, it said. He let the newspaper slide out of his hands. It clung to his lap for a moment then fell apart to the floor.

"I didn't say it before, but they should of shot you, you want *my* opinion!" The butcher said it, going fast, fast through the aisle, coming back the other way, gaining the end of the car and gone. Lestig did not turn around. Even wearing the smoked glasses to protect his damaged eyes, he could see too clearly. He thought about the months of blindness, and wondered again what had happened in that hooch, and considered how much better off he might be if he were *still* blind.

The Rock Island Line was a mighty good road, the Rock Island Line was the way to go. To go home. The land outside dimmed for him, as things frequently dimmed, as though the repairwork to his eyes was only temporary, a reserve generator cut in from time to time to sustain the power-feed to his vision, and dimming as the drain drank too deep. Then light seeped back in and he could see again. But there was a mist over his eyes, over the land.

Somewhere else, through another mist, a great beast sat haunchback, dripping chromatic fire from jeweled hide, nibbling at something soft in its paw, talons extended from around blackmoon pads. Watching, breathing, waiting for Lestig's vision to clear.

He had rented the car in Wichita, and driven back the sixty-five miles to Grafton. The Rock Island Line no longer stopped there. Passenger trains were almost a thing of the past in Kansas.

Lestig drove silently. No radio sounds accompanied him. He did not hum, he did not cough, he drove with his eyes straight ahead, not seeing the hills and valleys through which he passed, features of the land that gave the lie to the myth of totally flat Kansas. He drove like a man who, had he the power of images, thought of himself as a turtle drawn straight to the salt sea.

He paralleled the belt of sand hills on the south side of the Arkansas, turned off Route 96 at Elmer, below Hutchinson, due south onto 17. He had not driven these roads in three years, but then, neither had he swum or ridden a bicycle in all that time. Once learned, there was no forgetting.

Or Teresa.

Or home. No forgetting.

Or the hooch.

Or the smell of it. No forgetting.

He crossed the North Fork at the western tip of Cheney Reservoir and turned west off 17 above Pretty Prairie. He pulled into Grafton just before dusk, the immense running wash of the sun draining itself off behind the hills. The deserted buildings of the zinc mine—closed now for twelve years—stood against the sky like black fingers of a giant hand upturned and raised behind the nearest hill.

He drove once around the town mall, the Soldiers and Sailors Monument and the crumbling band shell its only ornaments. There was an American flag flying at half-mast from the City Hall. And another from the Post Office.

It was getting dark. He turned on his headlights. The mist over his eyes was strangely reassuring, as if it separated him from a land at once familiar and alien.

The stores on Fitch Street were closed, but the Utopia Theater's marquee was flashing and a small crowd was gathered waiting for the ticket booth to open. He slowed to see if he recognized anyone, and people stared back at him. A teenaged boy he didn't know pointed and then turned to his friends. In the rearview mirror Lestig saw two of them leave the queue and head for the candy shop beside the movie house. He drove through the business section and headed for his home.

He stepped on the headlight brightener but it did little to penetrate the dimness through which he marked his progress. Had he been a man of images, he might have fantasized that now saw the world through the eyes of some special beast. But he was not a man of images.

The house in which his family had lived for sixteen years was empty

There was a realtor's FOR SALE sign on the unmowed front lawn. Gramas and buffalo grass were taking over. Someone had taken a chain saw to the oak tree that had grown in the front yard. When it had fallen, the top branches had torn away part of the side porch of the house.

He forced an entrance through the coal chute at the rear of the house, and through the sooty remains of his vision he searched every room, both upstairs and down. It was slow work: he walked with an aluminum crutch.

They had left hurriedly, mother and father and Neola. Coat hangers clumped together in the closets like frightened creatures huddling for comfort. Empty cartons from a market littered the kitchen floor and in one of them a tea cup turned out a handle lay upside-down. The fireplace flue had been left open and rain had reduced the ashes in the grate to black paste. Mold grew in an open jar of blackberry preserves left on a kitchen cabinet shelf. There was dust.

He was touching the ripped shade hanging in a living room window when he saw the headlights of the cars turning into the driveway. Three of them pulled in, bumper to bumper. One more slewed in at the curb, their headlights flooding the living room with a dim glow. Doors slammed.

Lestig crutched back and to the side.

Hard-lined shapes moved in front of the headlights, seemed to be grouping, talking. One of them moved away from the pack and an arm came up, and something shone for a moment in the light, then a Stillson wrench came crashing through the front window in an explosion of glass.

"Lestig, you motherfuckin' bastard, come on out of there!"

He moved awkwardly but silently through the living room, into the kitchen and down the basement stairs. He was careful opening the coal chute window from the bin, and through the narrow slit he saw someone moving out there. They were all around the house. Coal shifted under his foot.

He let the window fall back smoothly and turned to go back upstairs. He didn't want to be trapped in the basement. From upstairs he heard the sounds of windows being smashed.

He took the stairs clumsily, clinging to the banister, his crutch useless, but moved quickly through the house and climbed the stairs to the upper floor. The top porch doorway was in what had been his parents' room; he unlocked and opened it. The screen door was hanging off at an angle, leaning against the outer wall by one hinge. He stepped out onto the porch, careful to avoid any places where the falling tree had weakened the structure. He looked down, back flat to the wall, but could see no one. He crutched to the railing, dropped the aluminum prop into the darkness, climbed over and began shinnying down one of the porch posts, clinging tightly with his thighs, as he had when he'd been a small boy, sneaking out to play after he'd been sent to bed.

It happened so quickly, he had no idea, even later, what had actually transpired. Before his foot touched the ground, someone grabbed him from behind. He fought to stay on the post, like a monkey on a stick, and even tried to kick out with his good foot; but he was pulled loose from the post and thrown down violently. He tried to roll, but he came up against a mulberry bush. Then he tried to dummy-up, fold into a bundle, but a foot caught him in the side and he fell over onto his back. His smoked glasses fell off, and through the sooty fog he could just make out someone dropping down to sit on his chest, something thick and long being raised above the head of the shape . . he strained to see . . . strained .

And then the shape screamed, and the weapon fell out of the hand and both hands clawed at the head, and the someone staggered to its feet and stumbled away, crashing through the mulberry bushes, still screaming.

Lestig fumbled around and found his glasses, pushed them onto his face. He was lying on the aluminum crutch. He got to his foot with the aid of the prop, like a skier righting himself after a spill.

He limped away behind the house next door, circled and came up on the empty cars still headed-in at the curb, their headlights splashing the house with dirty light. He slid in behind the wheel, saw it was a stick shift and knew with one foot he could not manage it. He slid out, moved to the second car, saw it was an automatic, and quietly opened the door. He slid behind the wheel and turned the key hard. The car thrummed to life and a mass of shapes erupted from the side of the house.

But he was gone before they reached the street.

He sat in the darkness, he sat in the sooty fog that obscured his sight, he sat in the stolen car. Outside Teresa's home. Not the house in which she'd lived when he'd left three years ago, but in the house of the man she'd married six months before, when Lestig's name had been first splashed across newspaper front pages.

He had driven to her parents' home, but it had been dark. He could not—or would not—break in to wait, but there had been a note taped to the mailbox advising the mailman to forward all letters to Teresa McCausland to this house.

He drummed the steering wheel with his fingers. His right leg ached from the fall. His shirtsleeve had been ripped and his left forearm bore a long, shallow gash from the mulberry bush. But it had stopped bleeding.

Finally, he crawled out of the car, dropped his shoulder into the crutch's padded curve, and rolled like a man with sea legs, up to the front door.

The white plastic button in the baroque backing was lit by a tiny nameplate bearing the word HOWARD. He pressed the button and a chime sounded somewhere on the other side of the door.

She answered the door wearing blue denim shorts and a man's white shirt, buttondown and frayed; a husband's cast-off.

"Vern . . ." Her voice cut off the sentence before she could say *oh* or *what are you* or *they said* or *no!*

"Can I come in?"

"Go away, Vern. My husband's –"

A voice from inside called, "Who is it, Terry?"

"Please go away," she whispered.

"I want to know where Mom and Dad and Neola went."

"Terry?"

"I can't talk to you . . . go away!"

"What the hell's going on around here, I *have* to know."

"Terry? Someone there?"

"Goodbye, Vern. I'm . . ." She slammed the door and did not say the word *sorry*.

He turned to go. Somewhere great corded muscles flexed, a serpentine throat lifted, talons flashed against the stars. His vision fogged, cleared for a moment, and in that moment rage sluiced through him. He turned back to the door, and leaned against the wall and banged on the frame with the crutch.

There was the sound of movement from inside, he heard Teresa arguing, pleading, trying to stop someone from going to answer the noise, but a second later the door flew open and Gary Howard stood in the doorway, older and thicker across the shoulders and angrier than Lestig had remembered him from senior year in high school, the last time they'd seen each other. The annoyance look of expecting Bible salesman, heart fund solicitor, girl scout cookie dealer, evening doorbell prankster changed into a smirk.

Howard leaned against the jamb, folded his arms across his chest so the off-tackle pectorals bunched against his Sherwood green tank top.

"Evening, Vern. When'd you get back?"

Lestig straightened, crutch jammed back into armpit. "I want to talk to Terry."

"Didn't know just when you'd come rolling in, Vern, but we knew you'd show. How was the war, old buddy?"

"You going to let me talk to her?"

"Nothing's stopping her, old buddy. My wife is a free agent when it comes to talking to ex-boyfriends. My *wife*, that is. You get the word . . . old buddy?"

"*Terry?*" He leaned forward and yelled past Howard.

Gary Howard smiled a ladies' choice dance smile and put one hand flat against Lestig's chest. "Don't make a nuisance of yourself, Vern."

"I'm talking to her, Howard. Right now, even if I have to go through you."

Howard straightened, hand still flat against Lestig's chest. "You miserable cowardly sonofabitch," he said, very gently, and shoved. Lestig flailed backward, the crutch going out from under him, and he tumbled off the front step.

Howard looked down at him, and the president of the senior class smile vanished. "Don't come back, Vern. The next time I'll punch out your fucking heart."

The door slammed and there were voices inside. High voices, and then the sound of Howard slapping her.

Lestig crawled to the crutch, and using the wall stood up. He thought of breaking in through the door, but he was Lestig, track . . . once . . . and Howard had been football. Still was. Would be, on Sunday afternoons with the children he'd made on cool Saturday nights in a bed with Teresa.

He went back to the car and sat in the darkness. He didn't know he'd been sitting there for some time, till the shadow moved up to the window and his head came around sharply.

"Vern . . .?"

"You'd better go back in. I don't want to cause you any more trouble."

"He's upstairs doing some sales reports. He got a very nice job as a salesman for Shoop Motors when he got out of the Air Force. We live nice, Vern. He's really very good to me. . . . Oh, Vern . . . why? Why'd you *do* it?"

"You'd better go back in."

"I waited, God you *know* I waited, Vern. But then all that terrible thing happened . . . Vern, why did you *do* it?"

"Come on, Terry. I'm tired, leave me alone."

"The whole town, Vern. They were so ashamed. There were reporters and TV people, they came in and talked to *everyone*. Your mother and father, Neola, they couldn't stay here any more."

"Where are they, Terry?"

"They moved away, Vern. Kansas City, I think."

"Oh, Jesus."

"Neola's living closer."

"Where?"

"She doesn't want you to know, Vern. I think she got married. I know she changed her name. . . . Lestig isn't such a good name around here any more."

"I've got to talk to her, Terry. Please. You've got to tell me where she is."

"I can't, Vern. I promised."

"Then call her. Do you have her number? Can you get in touch with her?"

"Yes, I think so. Oh, Vern . . ."

"Call her. Tell her I'll stay here in town till I can talk to her. Tonight. Please, Terry!"

She stood silently. Then said, "All right, Vern. Do you want her to meet you at your house?"

He thought of the hard-lined shapes in the glare of headlamps, and of the thing that had run screaming as he lay beside the mulberry bush. "No. Tell her I'll meet her in the church."

"St. Matthew's?"

"No. The Harvest Baptist."

"But it's closed, it has been for years."

"I know. It closed down before I left. I know a way in. She'll remember. Tell her I'll be waiting."

Light erupted through the front door, and Teresa Howard's face came up as she stared across the roof of the stolen car. She didn't even say goodbye, but her hand touched his face, cool and quick; and she ran back.

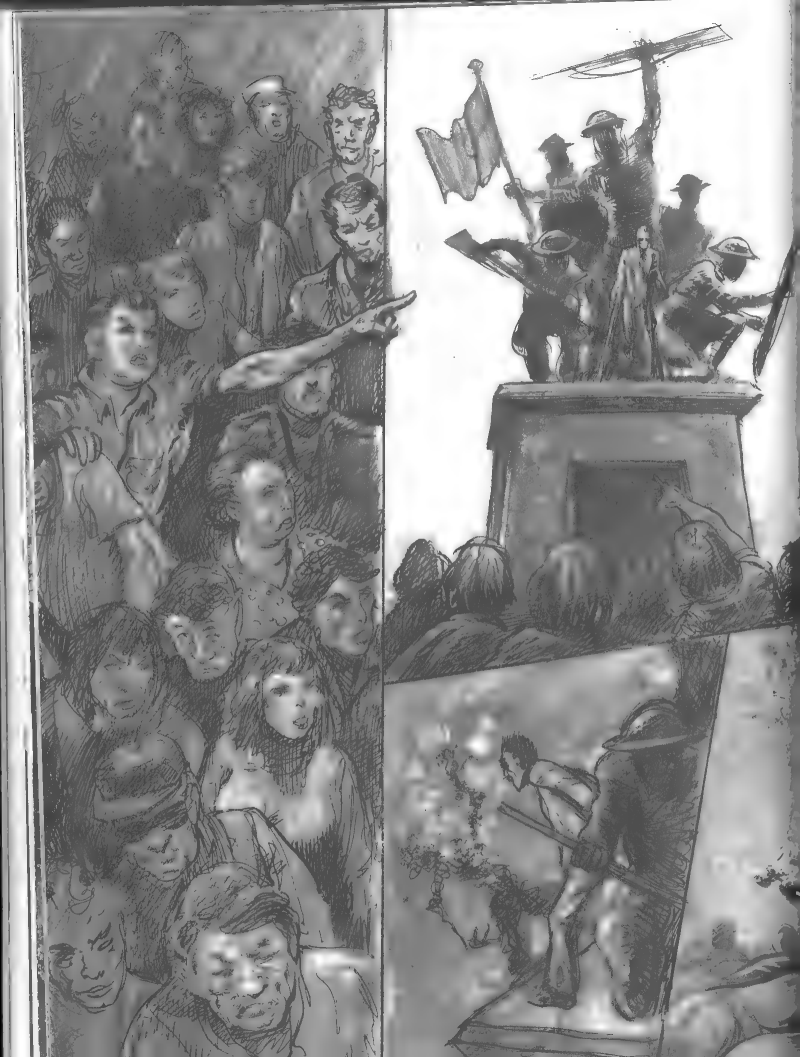
Knowing it was time once again to travel, the dragon-breath deathbeast eased sinuously to its feet and began treading down carefully through the fogs of limitless forevers. A soft, expectant purring came from its throat, and its terrible eyes burned with joy.

He was lying full out in one of the pews when the loose boards in the vestry wall creaked, and Lestig knew she had come. He sat up, wiping sleep from his fogged eyes, and replaced the smoked glasses. Somehow, they helped.

She came through the darkness in the aisle in front of the altar, and stopped. "Vernon?"

"I'm here, Sis."

She came toward the pew, but stopped three rows away.



"Why did you come back?"

His mouth was dry. He would have liked a beer. "Where else should I have gone?"

"Haven't you made enough trouble for Mom and Dad and me?"

He wanted to say things about his right foot and his eyesight, left somewhere in Southeast Asia. But even the light smear of skin he could see in the darkness told him her face was older, wearier, changed, and he could not do that to her.

"It was terrible, Vernon. Terrible. They came and talked to us and they wouldn't let us alone. And they set up television cameras and made movies of the house and we couldn't even go out. And when they went away the people from town came, and they were even worse, oh God, Vern you can't believe what they did. One night they came to break things, and they cut down the tree and Dad tried to stop them and they beat him up so bad, Vern. You should have seen him. It would have made you cry, Vern."

And he thought of his foot.

"We went away, Vern. We had to. We hoped—" She stopped.

"You hoped I'd be convicted and shot or sent away."

She said nothing.

He thought of the hooch and the smell.

"Okay, Sis. I understand."

"I'm sorry, Vernon. I'm really sorry, dear. But why did you do this to us? Why?"

He didn't answer for a long time, and finally she came to him, and put her arms around him and kissed his neck, and then she slipped away in the darkness and the wall boards creaked, and he was alone.

He sat there in the pew, thinking nothing. He stared at the shadows till his eyes played him tricks and he thought he saw little speckles of light dancing. Then the light glimmers changed and coalesced and turned red and he seemed to be staring first into a mirror, and then into the eyes of some monstrous creature, and his head hurt and his eyes burned. . . .

And the church changed, melted, swam before his eyes and he fought for breath, and pulled at his throat, and the church reformed and he was in the hooch again; they were questioning him.

He was crawling.

Crawling across a dirt floor, pulling himself forward with his fingers leaving flesh-furrows in the earth, trying to crawl away from them.

"Crawl! Crawl and perhaps we will let you live!"

He crawled and their legs were at his eye level, and he tried to reach up to touch one of them, and they hit him. Again and again. But the pain was not the worst of it. The monkey cage where they kept him boxed for endless days and nights. Too small to stand, too narrow to lie down, open to the rain, open to the insects that came and nested in the raw stump of his leg, and laid their eggs, and the itching that sent lilliputian arrows up into his side, and the light that hung from jerry-rigged wires through the trees, the light that never went out, day or night, and no sleep, and the questions, the endless questions. . . and he crawled. . . God how he crawled. . . if he could have crawled around the world on both bloody hands and one foot, scouring away the knees of his pants, he would have crawled, just to sleep, just to stop the arrows of pain. . . he would have crawled to the center of the earth and drunk the menstrual blood of the planet. . . for only a time of quiet, a straightening of his legs, a little sleep. . . .

Why did you do this to us, why?

Because I'm a human being and I'm weak and no one should be expected to be able to take it. Because I'm a man and not a book of rules that says I have to take it. Because I was in a place without sleep and I didn't want to be there and there was no one to save me. Because I wanted to live.

He heard boards creaking.

He blinked his eyes and sat silently and listened, and there was movement in the church. He reached for his smoked glasses, but they were out of reach, and he reached further and the crutch slid away from the pew seat and dropped with a crash. Then they were on him.

Whether it was the same bunch he never knew.

They came for him and vaulted the pews and smashed into him before he could use whatever it was he'd used on the kid at the house, the kid who lay on a table in the City Hall covered with a sheet through which green stains and old rotting smells oozed.

They jumped him and beat him, and he flailed up through the mass of bodies and was staring directly into a wild-eyed mandrill face, and he *looked* at him.

Looked at him. As the deathbeast struck.

The man screamed, clawed at his face, and his face came away in handfuls, the rotting flesh dripping off his fingers. He fell back, carrying two others with him, and Lestig suddenly remembered what had happened in the hooch, remembered breathing and looking and here in the house of a God got away he spun on them, one by one, and he breathed deeply and exhaled in their faces and stared at them across the evil night wasteland of another universe, and they shrieked and died and he was all alone once more. The others, coming through the vestry wall, having followed Neola, having been telephoned by Gary Howard, who had beaten the information from his wife, the others stopped and turned and ran.

So that only Lestig, brother to the basilisk, who was itself the servant of a nameless dark one far away, only Lestig was left standing amid the twisted body shapes of things that had been men.

Stood alone, felt the power and the fury pulsing in him, felt his eyes glowing, felt the death that lay on his tongue, died in his throat, the wind death in his lungs. And knew night had finally fallen.

They had roadblocked the only two roads out of town. Then they took eight-cell battery flashlights and Coleman lanterns and cave-crawling lamps, and some of them who had worked the zinc mine years before, they donned the miner's helmets with the lights on them, and they even wound rags around clubs and dipped them in kerosene and lit them, and they went out searching for the filthy traitor who had killed their sons and husbands and brothers, and not one of them laughed at the scene of crowd lights moving through the town, like something from an old film. A film of hunters and the monster. They did not draw the parallel, for had they drawn the parallel, they would still never have laughed.

And they searched through the night, but did not find him. And when the dawn came up and they doused their lamps and the parking lights replaced headlights on the caravan of cars that ringed the town, they still had not found him. And finally they gathered in the mall, to decide what to do.

And he was there.

He stood on the Soldiers and Sailors Monument high above them, where he had huddled all through the night, at the foot of a World War I doughboy with his arm upraised around Springfield in his fist. He was there, and the symbolism did not escape them.

"Pull him down!" someone shouted. And they surged toward the marble-and-bronze monument.

Vernon Lestig stood watching them come toward him, and seemed unconcerned at the rifles and clubs and war-souvenir daggers coming toward him.

The first man to scale the plinth was Gary Howard, with the broken-field cheers of the crowd smile on his face. Lestig's eyes widened behind the smoked glasses, and very casually he surveyed them, and he *looked* at the big, many-toothed car salesman.

The crowd seemed in one voice and the forward rush was halted as the still-smoking body of Teresa's husband fell back down, arms flung out wide, torso twisted.

In the rear, they tried to run. He cut them down. The crowd stopped. One man tried to raise a revolver to kill him, and he dropped, his face burned away, smoking pustules of charred flesh where his eyes had been.

They stopped. Frozen in a world of muscles that trembled, running energy with no place to go.

"I'll show you!" he yelled. "I'll show you what it's like! You want to know, so I'll show you!"

Then he breathed, and men died. Then he looked and never fell. Then he said, very quietly, so they would hear him. "It's easy, till it happens. You never know, patriots! You think all the time and you say one thing or another, all your lives about what it takes to be brave, but you never *know*, till just one time when you find out. *I* found out, it's not so easy. But *you'll* find out."

He pointed to the ground.

"Get down on your knees and crawl, patriots! Crawl to me and maybe I'll let you live. Get down like animals and crawl on your bellies to me."

There was a shout from the crowd; and the man died.

"*Crawl. I said!* Crawl to me!"

Here and there in the crowd people dropped from sight. At the rear a woman tried to run away and he burned her out like the husk fell, and all around her, within sight of the plume of smoke from her face, people fell to their knees. Then entire groups dropped; then one whole side of the mob went down. Then they were all on their knees.

"Crawl! Crawl, brave ones, crawl nice my people! Crawl and learn it's better to *live*, any way at all, to stay alive, because you're human! Crawl and you'll understand your slogans are shit, your rules are for others! Crawl for your goddamned lives and you'll understand! *Crawl!*"

And they crawled. They crept forward on hands and knees, across the grass, across cement and mud and the branches of small bushes, across the dirt. They crawled toward him.

And far away, through mists of darkness, the Helmet-Headed One sat on his throne, high above all, with the basilisk at his feet, and he smiled.

"Crawl, God damn you!"

But he did not know the name of the God he served.

"Crawl!"

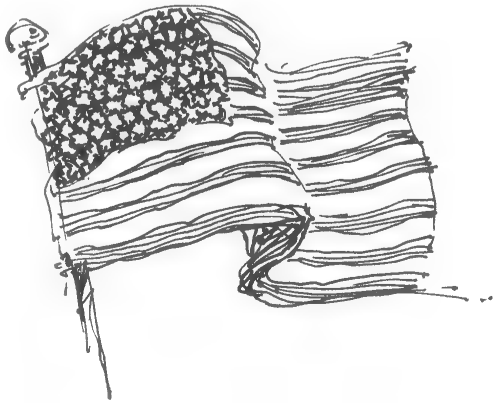
And in the middle of the mob, a woman who had hung a gold star in her front window, crawled across a .32 Police Positive, and her hand touched it, and she folded her fingers around it, and suddenly she raised up and screamed, "For Kennyyyyy. . . !" and she fired.

The bullet smashed Lestig's collarbone and he spun sidewise, up against the Yank's puttees, and he tried to regain his stance but the crutch had fallen, and now the crowd was on its feet and firing. . . and firing. . .

They buried the body in an unmarked grave, and no one talked of it. And far away, on a high throne, tickling the sleek hide of the basilisk that reclined at his feet like a faithful mastiff, even the Armored One did not speak of it. There was no need to speak of it. Lestig was gone, but that was to have been expected.

The weapon had been deactivated, but Mars, the Eternal One, the God Who Never Dies, the Lord of Futures, Warden of the Dark Places, Ever-Potent Scion of Conflict, Master of Men, Mars sat content.

The recruiting had gone well. Power to the people.



Qarlo hunkered down further into the firmhole, gathering his cloak about him. Even the triple-lining of the cape could not prevent the seeping cold of the battlefield from reaching him; he could feel the faint tickle of dropout, all about him, eating at his tissues.

He began to shiver again.

Off to the left the hiss of an eighty-thread beam split the night air. The spider-web tracery of the beam lanced across the sky, poked tentatively at an armor center...

...throwing blood-red shadows across Qarlo's crag-like features.

The armor center backtracked the beam, retaliated with a blinding flash of its own batteries.

The eighty-thread reared once more, feebly, then subsided. A moment later, the concussion of its power chambers exploding shook the Earth around Qarlo.

Qarlo lay flat to the ground, soundlessly hoping for a bit more life amidst all this death. He knew his chances of coming back were infinitesmal. What was it? Three out of every thousand came back? He had no illusions. He was a common footman, and he knew he would die out here, in the midst of the Great War VII.

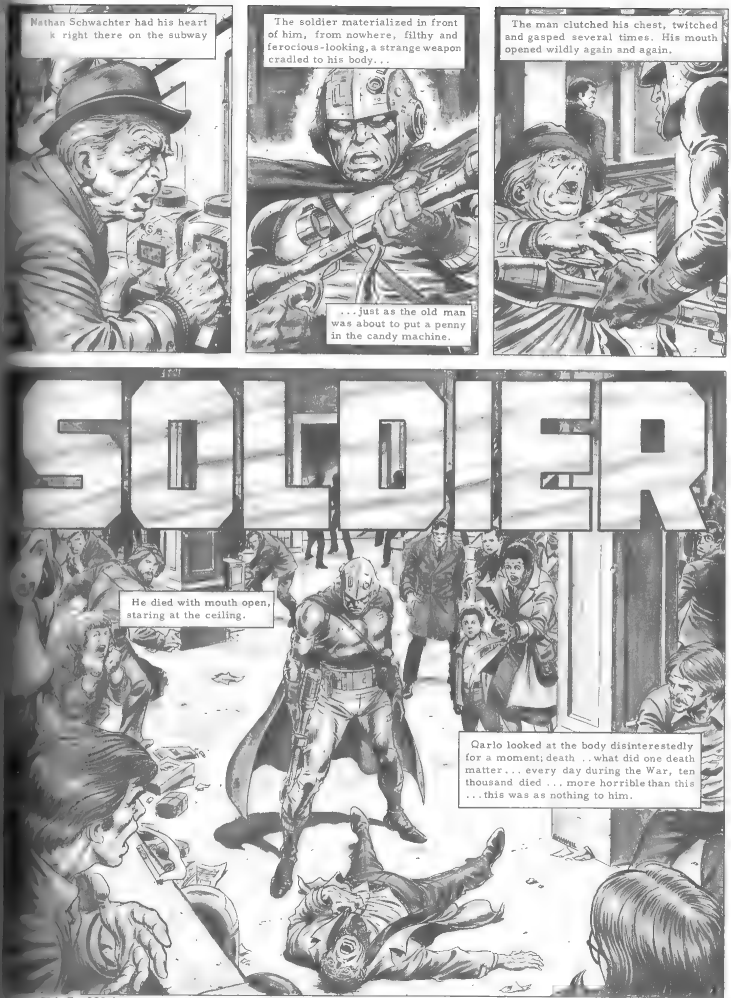
Abruptly, th... thread beams c... out, the trace... winked off, sile... once again descen... d. Qarlo snapp... to instant attenti... ness. This was ... moment. His mi... was now keyed ... one sound, one s... Inside his head ... command wo... form, and he wo... act. When the e... imenter sent ... telepathic orde... Qarlo would le... like a puppet a... advance on dire... ion. Thus, when ... came, it was ... though he had ... anticipated it.

A second sooner than he should have been, he was up, out of the firmhole, hugging his Brandelmeier to his chest. Even before the mental word actually came.

When the first blasts of the enemy's zeroed-in batteries met the combined rays of Qarlo's own guns, also pin-pointed, they met at a point that should by all rights have been empty. But Qarlo had jumped too soon, and when they met, the soldier was at the focal point.

Three hundred distinct beams latticed down, joined in a coruscating rainbow, threw negatively charged particles five hundred feet in the air, shorted out...

...and wa... the soldier ... the battlefie...

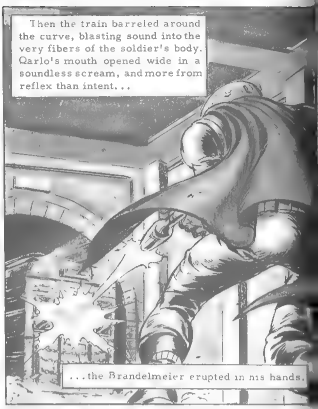

Nathan Schwachter had his heart
k right there on the subway
The soldier materialized in front of him, from nowhere, filthy and ferocious-looking, a strange weapon cradled to his body...
...just as the old man was about to put a penny in the candy machine.
The man clutched his chest, twitched and gasped several times. His mouth opened wildly again and again.
SOLDIER
He died with mouth open, staring at the ceiling.
Carlo looked at the body disinterestedly for a moment; death ..what did one death matter... every day during the War, ten thousand died ... more horrible than this ...this was as nothing to him.

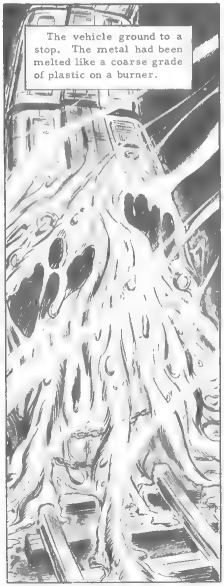
t © 1980 by Harlan Ellison.

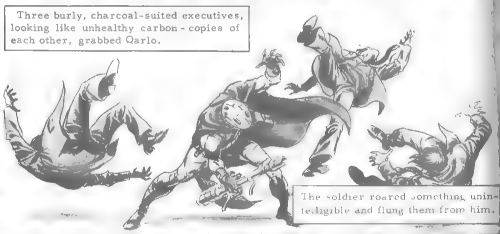
Artwork ©1980 Kerry Gammill

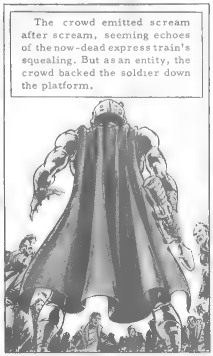
The sudden universe - filling scream of an incoming express train broke his attention.
The black tunnel that his war-filled world had become, was filled with the rusty wail of an unseen monster, bearing down on him out of the darkness.

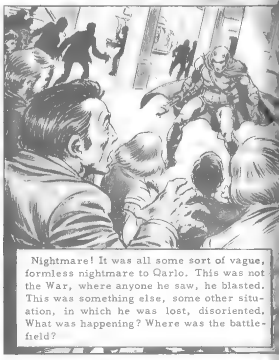
From the crowds packed on the platform, a voice rose over the thunder of the incoming train: "Him! It was him! He shot that old man ...he's crazy!"

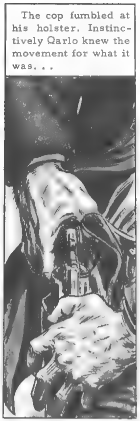

Then the train barreled around the curve, blasting sound into the very fibers of the soldier's body. Qarlo's mouth opened wide in a soundless scream, and more from reflex than intent...
...the Brandelmeier erupted in his hands.

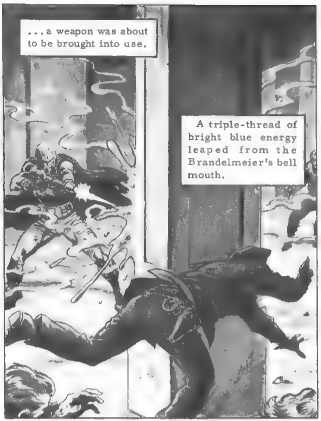

The vehicle ground to a stop. The metal had been melted like a coarse grade of plastic on a burner.

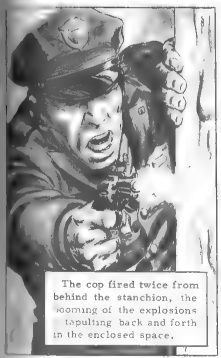

Three burly, charcoal-suited executives, looking like unhealthy carbon-copies of each other, grabbed Qarlo.
The soldier roared something unintelligible and flung them from him.


The crowd emitted scream after scream, seeming echoes of the now-dead express train's squealing. But as an entity, the crowd backed the soldier down the platform.


Nightmare! It was all some sort of vague, formless nightmare to Qarlo. This was not the War, where anyone he saw, he blasted. This was something else, some other situation, in which he was lost, disoriented. What was happening? Where was the battlefield?

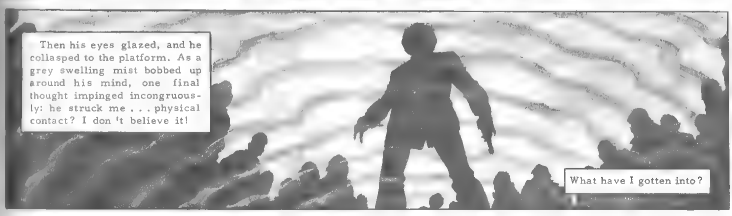


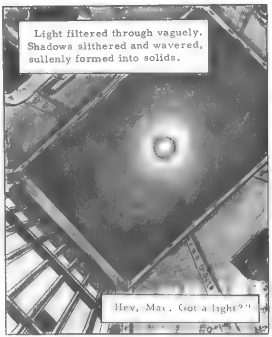


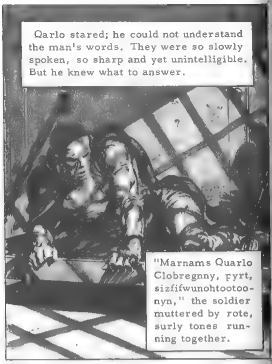

The cop fired twice from behind the stanchion, the booming of the explosions catapulting back and forth in the enclosed space.

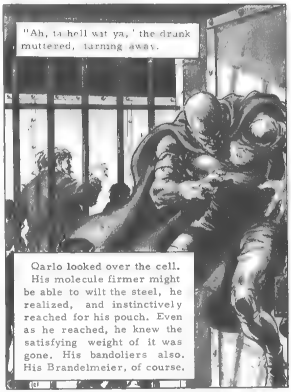
What manner of weapon was this? Nothing like anything he had ever seen before. No beam to fry him in his tracks. It was some sort of power that hurled a projectile, that ripped his body. He stared stupidly as blood continued to flow out of his arm.

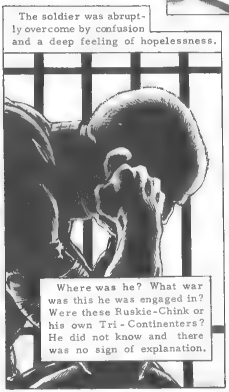
Savagely, the policeman brought the barrel of his pistol down on the back of Qarlo's neck The soldier stared unbelievingly at him for an instant.

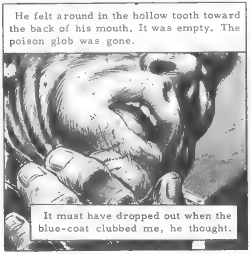

Then his eyes glazed, and he collasped to the platform. As a grey swelling mist bobbed up around his mind, one final thought impinged incongruously: he struck me . . . physical contact? I don't believe it!
What have I gotten into?



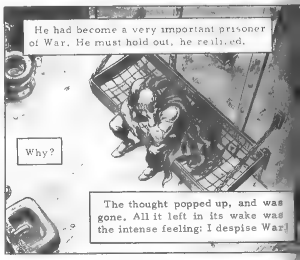

Qarlo stared; he could not understand the man's words. They were so slowly spoken, so sharp and yet unintelligible. But he knew what to answer.
"Marnams Quarlo Globregnny, pyrt, sizfifwunohtootoonyn," the soldier muttered by rote, surly tones running together.


"Ah, to hell wit ya," the drunk muttered, turning away.
Qarlo looked over the cell. His molecule firmer might be able to wilt the steel, he realized, and instinctively reached for his pouch. Even as he reached, he knew the satisfying weight of it was gone. His bandoliers also. His Brandelmeier, of course.


The soldier was abruptly overcome by confusion and a deep feeling of hopelessness.
Where was he? What war was this he was engaged in? Were these Ruskie-Chink or his own Tri-Continenters? He did not know and there was no sign of explanation.


He felt around in the hollow tooth toward the back of his mouth. It was empty. The poison glob was gone.
It must have dropped out when the blue-coat clubbed me, he thought.

He realized he was at their mercy. And he had no way to stop their extracting information. It was bad. Very bad, according to the warning conditioning he had received. They could use Probers, or hypno-scourge, or any of a hundred different methods which would reveal to them The strength of numbers in his company, the battery placements, the gun ranges, the identity and thought wave band of every officer ... in fact, a good deal. More than he thought he knew.


He had become a very important prisoner of War. He must hold out, he realized.
Why?
The thought popped up, and was gone. All it left in its wake was the intense feeling: I despise War!

He might have remained in jail indefinitely, considered a madman. But the desk sergeant grew curious about the strangely shaped weapon.

As he put the things into security, he tested the Brandelmeier—never realizing what it could do...

...and melted away one wall of the safe room.

He called the Captain, and the Captain called the F.B.I. and the F.B.I. called Internal Security, and Internal Security said, "Preposterous!" and checked back. When the Brandelmeier had been thoroughly tested—as much as it could be tested, since the rifle had no seams, no apparent power source, and fantastic range—they were willing to believe. They had the soldier removed from his cell, transported under sedation, along with his pouch, and a philologist named Soames, to the I.S. general headquarters in Washington, D.C.

When Qarlo came back to consciousness, he found himself again in a cell, this time quite unlike the first. No bars, but just as solid to hold him in, with padded walls.

He sat down and rubbed his bristled top in wonder. Was he never to find out what had happened to himself?

And when was he going to shake this strange feeling that he was being watched?

Overhead, Lyle Sims and his secretary watched the TV screen, along with the philologist named Soames. Sims had been special advisor to an unnamed branch office of Internal Security for five years, dealing with every strange or offbeat problem too outre for regulation inquiry. He was quick to recognize authenticity, even quicker to recognize fakery.

As he watched, his trained instincts took over completely, and he knew in a moment of spying that the man in the cell below was out of the ordinary.

"Six feet three inches," he recited to the girl beside him. She made the notation and he went on calling out characteristics of the soldier below.

"Brown hair, clipped so short you can see the scalp. Brown, no, black eyes. Many scars."

"Something else... His head seems to be oddly shaped. The forehead seems to be pressing foreward in front as though he had been smacked hard and it was swelling. I think we've got something almost too hot to handle."

Soames smiled. "Come, come, Mr. Sims. After all... he is only an alien of some sort. All we have to do is find out what country he's from."

"Have you heard him talk yet?"

Soames shook his head.

"Then don't be too quick to think he's just a foreigner. The word 'alien' may be more correct than you think — only not in the way you think."

A confused look spread across Soames's face. He gave a slight shrug, as though he could not fathom what Lyle Sims meant ... and was not particularly interested.

They walked downstairs together and Sims let the philologist into the padded room, cautioning him to deal gently with the man.

"Don't forget," Sims warned, "we're not sure where he comes from, and sudden movements may make him jumpy."

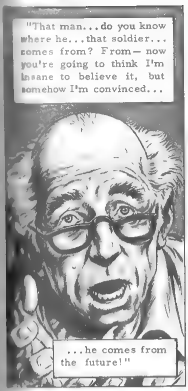
"But above all, figure out what he's saying, where he's from."

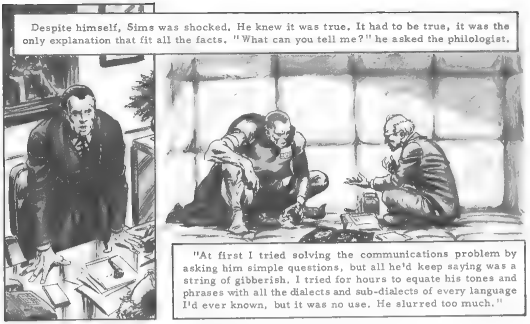
He opened the door and Soames passed through uneasily.

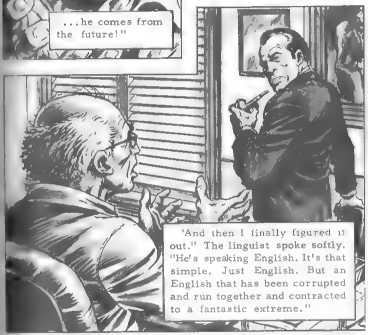
It looked to be a long wait.

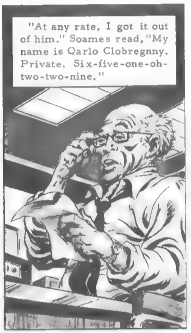
Soames was white as paste. His face was drawn and the complacent attitude he had shown since his arrival in Washington was shattered.

His tones were amazed. "Do you know what you've got down there in that cell?"


"That man...do you know where he...that soldier... comes from? From— now you're going to think I'm insane to believe it, but somehow I'm convinced...
...he comes from the future!"


Despite himself, Sims was shocked. He knew it was true. It had to be true, it was the only explanation that fit all the facts. "What can you tell me?" he asked the philologist.
"At first I tried solving the communications problem by asking him simple questions, but all he'd keep saying was a string of gibberish. I tried for hours to equate his tones and phrases with all the dialects and sub-dialects of every language I'd ever known, but it was no use. He slurred too much."


'And then I finally figured it out." The linguist spoke softly. "He's speaking English. It's that simple. Just English. But an English that has been corrupted and run together and contracted to a fantastic extreme."



Problem:

A man from the future. An ordinary man, without any special talents, without any great store of intelligence. The equivalent of "the man in the street." A man who owns a fantastic little machine that turns sand into solid matter, harder than steel — but who hasn't the vaguest notion of how it works or how to analyze it. A man whose knowledge of past history is as vague and formless as any modern man's. A soldier. With no other talent than fighting. What is to be done with such a man?

Solution: Unknown.

He was a potential menace, of incalculable potential. What if an enemy power grabbed him, and did somehow manage to work out the concepts behind the rifle, the armor, the mono-atomic anti-gravity device in the pouch? What then?

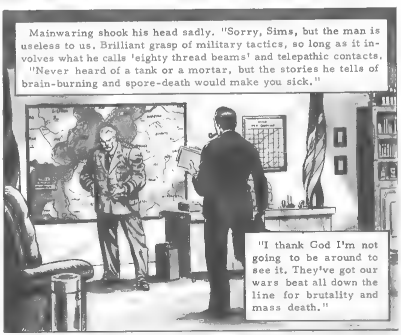
No, something had to be done with him.

Imprison him? For what? The man had done no harm intentionally.

Kill him? Unjust and brutal, not to mention wasteful.

Find a place for him in society? Doing What? All Qarlo knew was war.

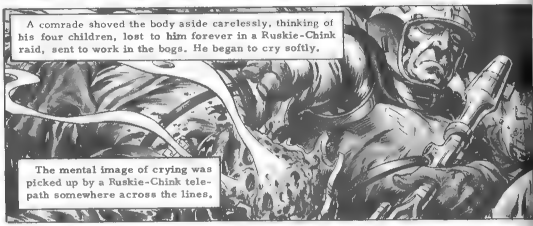
The question abruptly answered itself. Sims pressed the key of his intercom. "Get me General Mainwaring, General Polk and the Secretary of Defense."


Mainwaring shook his head sadly. "Sorry, Sims, but the man is useless to us. Brilliant grasp of military tactics, so long as it involves what he calls 'eighty thread beams' and telepathic contacts. "Never heard of a tank or a mortar, but the stories he tells of brain-burning and spore-death would make you sick."
"I thank God I'm not going to be around to see it. They've got our wars beat all down the line for brutality and mass death."

"And the strange thing is, this Qarlo fellow despises it! Felt foolish as hell, but for a while there, when he was explaining it, I almost wanted to chuck my career, go out and start beating the drum for disarmament."

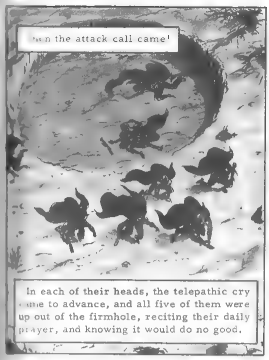
It was apparent Qarlo was useless as a tactician. But it didn't really matter, for Sims was certain the general had given him the answer to the problem, inadvertently. If it worked out, Qarlo Clobregnny, the soldier and nothing but the soldier, could be the most valuable man Time had ever spawned.

One of the men screamed as the radiation took hold in his gut, and he felt the organs watering away.
He leaped up, vomiting blood and phlegm—and was caught across the face by a robot-tracked triple beam.


A comrade shoved the body aside carelessly, thinking of his four children, lost to him forever in a Ruskie-Chink raid, sent to work in the bogs. He began to cry softly.
The mental image of crying was picked up by a Ruskie-Chink telepath somewhere across the lines.

The soldier began to tear at his features wildly, screaming high and piercing, as the enemy telepath burned away his brain.

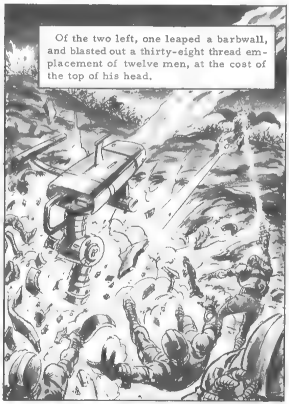
A thin, brittle, knife-edged bit of hot shrapnel arched over the edge of the firm-hole, and buried itself in one of the soldier's head.
He died in spasms, and it took an awfully long while.


Then the attack call came!
In each of their heads, the telepathic cry came to advance, and all five of them were up out of the firmhole, reciting their daily prayer, and knowing it would do no good.

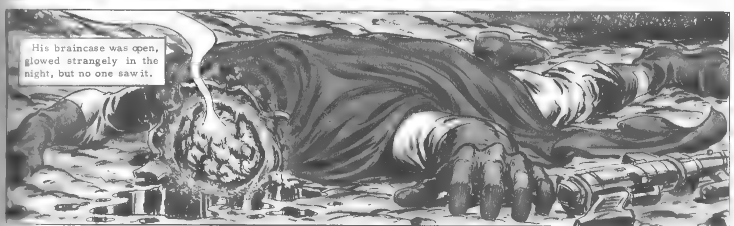
A head popped out of a firmhole before them, and two of the men fired simultaneously.

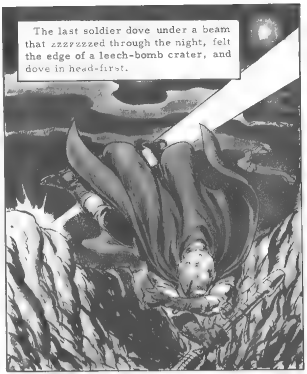
The enemy was a booby—rigged to backtrack their kill urge, rigged to a telepathic hookup—and even as the body exploded...
A pyrotic-telepath had been at work.

A doggie-mine slithered across the ground, entwined itself in the legs of one soldier...
...and blew the legs out from under him.


Of the two left, one leaped a barbwall, and blasted out a thirty-eight thread emplacement of twelve men, at the cost of the top of his head.

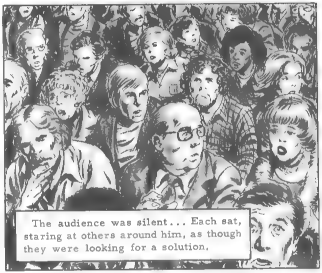
He was left alive, and curiously, as though the war had stopped, he felt the top of himself, and his fingers passed lightly against convoluted, slick matter for a second before he dropped to the ground.

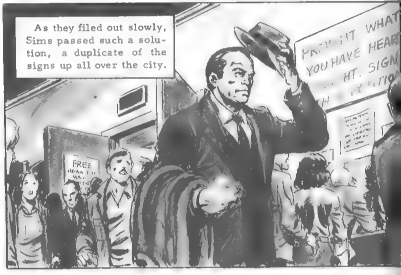

His braincase was open, glowed strangely in the night, but no one saw it.

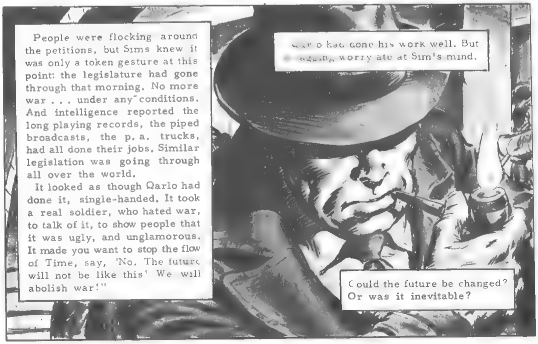

The last soldier dove under a beam that zzzzzzzed through the night, felt the edge of a leech-bomb crater, and dove in head-first.

He lay in the hole, feeling the cold of the battlefield seeping around him, and drew his cloak closer.
The soldier was Qarlo.

He finished talking, and sat down on the platform.
QARLO
SOLDIER FROM
THE FUTURE


The audience was silent... Each sat, staring at others around him, as though they were looking for a solution.


As they filed out slowly, Sims passed such a solution, a duplicate of the signs up all over the city.


People were flocking around the petitions, but Sims knew it was only a token gesture at this point: the legislature had gone through that morning. No more war . . . under any conditions. And intelligence reported the long playing records, the piped broadcasts, the p. a. trucks, had all done their jobs. Similar legislation was going through all over the world.
It looked as though Qarlo had done it, single-handed. It took a real soldier, to hate war, to talk of it, to show people that it was ugly, and unglamorous. It made you want to stop the flow of Time, say, 'No. The future will not be like this' We will abolish war!"
Qarlo had done his work well. But [illegible] worry ate at Sim's mind.
Could the future be changed? Or was it inevitable?

He walked back inside to sign the petitions again...
... though it was his fifteenth time.

A Conversation with the Man Who Hates Television

We thought it might be nice to rock our sedate little boat of videophiles by presenting the views of a well known, articulate and intelligent person who feels that television is pretty much a crock of shit. Marc Wielage informed us that he had met the man, so we sent Marc, with Mike Clark in tow, to beard the lion in his den. Herewith, Marc's report:

I first met Harlan Ellison about 5 years ago, at the 32nd World Science Fiction Convention in Washington, D.C. I was walking down a corridor in the hotel, when I heard a commotion up ahead of me—a crowd of at least 6 or 7 teen-aged lovelies who were laughing and smiling and giggling as if it were Senior Prom night. The center of their attention: a loud-mouthed, humourously obnoxious pipe-smoking geek wearing an all-leather suit, a man whose stature befitted the title of "the world's tallest elf". He strolled past while the lookers buzzed excitedly. "Who was that?" I asked a wide-eyed acquaintance. "That, nimnul, is none other than Harlan Ellison!" he replied.

Well, I recognized the name immediately as being the person who had written among my all-time favorite TV shows—"Soldier" and "Demon with a Glass Hand" from Outer Limits, "City on the Edge of Forever" from Star Trek, other episodes of series like Alfred Hitchcock and Man from U.N.C.L.E. as well as several features—and I was honestly in awe.

His stories have won countless awards and praise from the science-fiction community, including Hugos and Nebulas for "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream", "Repent, Harlequin!' Said the Ticktockman", "A Boy and His Dog", and numerous others. His scripts have likewise received much honor from his peers: three Writers' Guild awards, including "City on the Edge of Forever" and "The Starlost", the latter famous as the Canadian-produced "Sci-Fi Disaster" (in every sense of the word) that Harlan deserted, leaving behind close to $100,000 in profits—his bank account a little lower but his integrity left intact. The full story of that sad yet hilarious escapade is given in Phoenix Without Ashes (Fawcett, 1975), complete with Ed Bryant's fine novelization of the pilot script for the show.

Television scholars, too, should be familiar with Harlan's fine essays on the medium in The Glass Teat and The Other Glass Teat (Pyramid Books, 1975). They're enough to curl the hair of any television addict, pointing out, among other things, the dangers inherent in television viewing—everything from stifling the imagination to numbing the mind's appreciation of real-life violence with fantasy-violence.

Harlan is not just your average angry man. I mean, he takes anger and energy and enthusiasm and wit and wraps them up into one personality that you will never forget, through his writings, his films, or his personal appearances. And his works won't just make you angry—no, they'll make you afraid, indignant, shocked, happy—any way you look at it, you won't be the same after picking up and experiencing a Harlan Ellison story.

In the industry, he's widely known as a guy who will not sell out, someone who's got to retain absolute control over what he writes. As Harlan put it on a recent appearance on the Tomorrow Show: "My words are not engraved in gold . . . but they are my words, and I want them done the way I want them. I don't want some shithead changing them. I don't want some clown who was in the mailroom 4 days ago coming in and rewriting my story, which is what happens." And also: "If tomorrow they put one of those loyalty oaths in front of me—'are you loyal to the USA or to your writing?'—forget it, Jack! The country could sink into the ocean for all I care. I only care about the integrity of the work . . . that's all I really give a damn about. And I'll kill to keep those words that way."

And kill he will, as you'll see in the following interview we conducted with Ellison in late February, at his remarkable house in the LA foothills. If only as a warning to some of our more faint-hearted readers: Harlan's not someone to be taken, or read, lightly. If four-letter words aren't your bag, you'd better skip over to one of the less provocative sections of the magazine. And be prepared—he's bound to stir up some controversy being "The Man Who Hates Television." Let's face it, folks: in our heart of hearts, we know the guy is right—too much television, hell, too much of anything, is surely bad for us. We may wind up as the first civilization ever to fall because of orthicon tubes and electron guns instead of armies and H-Bombs.

We'll leave it up to you to decide. And don't be surprised if, after you've finished reading what he's got to say, you begin to wonder how many hours you spend before your electronic window each week. And start to worry if your brain sloshes like tapioca when you start to shake your head in disbelief.

TV: Harlan, you said a long time ago, about ten years ago in The Glass Teat, "I think we can change the face of not only TV-land in America but also the face of our times." You also said you thought that TV in the 70s would be better than anything we've ever seen because for the first time, the networks would be programming for young audiences. What happened?

Ellison: Well, it didn't get any more fucked up than it was. I was wrong—I was dead wrong. I was banking on the verve and level of commitment of the 60s and early 70s to carry many of the multi-national corporations along with them, thereby proving what the revolutionaries had known, which is that nothing stops it short of bombing it out of existence. Entropically speaking, these things will continue rolling, the snowball will keep growing . . .

TV: . . . and they get worse and worse?

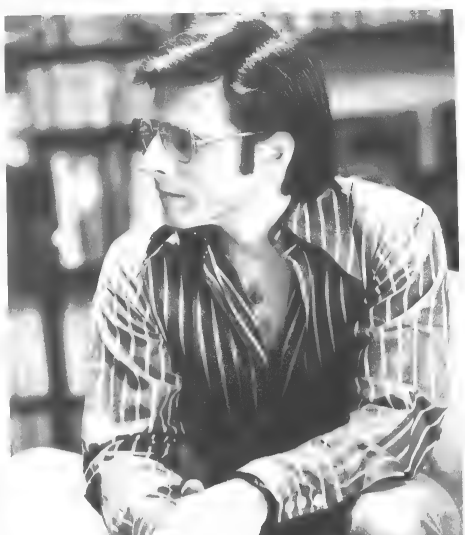
Ellison: Well, yeah . . . worse and worse, but also better and better. You see, at the same time that it's worse and worse, people who are the apologists for television can say, "Look at it—ten years ago we couldn't have done Battlestar: Ponderosa. Look at the wonderful advances we've made!" They make the mistake of substituting technical expertise for qualitative betterment, and there is no such thing. In point of fact, television is infinitely *less* daring now than it was 25–30 years ago. The reason for that is very simple. I don't think it takes a genius to perceive that the more money there is involved in something, the more people there are guarding it, which means the more opinions there are and the more judgments you'll have between the viewer and the creator. The greatest disappointment of the last decade for me has been the coopting of all those people who were out in the streets protesting; all of those kids have now become young adults, and they've all moved right into the establishment.

TV: They've lost their enthusiasm, maybe become disillusioned.

Ellison: They did the fighting and then they

"Loudmouthed," "all-leather suit," "world's tallest elf." The first is a value-judgment on Mr. Wielage's part. It has been my experience that individuals whose self-esteem is shaky rationalize their feelings of inadequacy by laying the burden of onerousness on others who feel secure enough to be outgoing and garrulous. Consider: there is a constant denigration of the high-verbals by the reticent; but you never hear those of us who are capable of human speech putting down the poor timorous wimps who deify their zombie-like manner with the encomium "shy." As for the second phrase, I have never been over in my entire life, owned or worn a leather suit. Mr. Wielage may have seen me in a leather jacket. Beyond that, I suggest one weigh all further observations and value judgments (such as "world's tallest elf") in the scale of Mr. Wielage's inaccuracies in just this initial paragraph. [Correspondent Wielage tells us that his description of Ellison here was a first impression. Also, being himself an elf, he fails to look on the title "world's tallest elf" as derogatory.—Ed.]

said, "I've paid my dues. I'm tired." And they didn't take the time to solidify it. What we have now is a replay of the 50s: commercial success, security and "happiness" are the holy grails you go for. All the people who were out in the streets got tired . . . it happens. You fight the battle about when I said, "Success meant being totally free. It meant being able to get as big as you wanted to be." They saw . . . they interpreted it as two cars in the garage and a microwave oven. And I started screaming at them, saying, "You fools! Don't you understand? Two cars and a



Dan Tooker

for ten years, and you get tired. You say, "I can't take any more. I want to relax. I want to enjoy some of the good things I fought for." Many of those people who wrote for the underground papers, who worked in peace programs, who marched and went to jail, got ripped off for their time while the entrepreneurs were making money. There were as many rip-off people as those who were honestly concerned. The people who did the work said, "hey, it's my time to get a little something now!" And there is nothing wrong with that. They are entitled. But high school kids today sit and watch television constantly. I just came back from Seattle two or three days ago, where I spoke to a rather large class—about fifty kids—at Roosevelt High School. The teacher had gathered them all together, and they could not understand—really could not, gut-level, understand—what I was talking microwave oven is what they throw at you to keep you from seeing what the important stuff is! They pay you money! They get you laid! They give you dope! They turn you on to religion! These are the things—television primarily—that go at you endlessly, day after day, so you won't pay attention to what the really important things in life are. The things that really and genuinely enrich you and make you great . . . things that permit you to paint the Sistine Chapel ceiling, or write Moby Dick, or discover radium, or put your foot on the moon. These are the things they give you to keep you blind, to keep you dull, to keep you stunned, to keep you stoned." A few of the kids began to respond, maybe three out of sixty. The rest of them all turned aside with dull expressions on their faces. These were high school seniors! And you say, "Well, they'll get better when they get to college." But, no: it's the same thing: they're illiterate, they can't read or write. Television has very adequately seen to that, and they keep saying, "Who is 'they'? Who is 'they'?" They want a villain. Who is the villain? Who do we pin it on?

TV: It's everybody.

Ellison: Absolutely—there is no villain. There are only villains in TV shows; and life ain't a TV show. It's an inarticulate conspiracy of the universe. The universe likes to keep the water nice and smooth—"don't want no trouble, don't make no waves." And society is like that, and systems are like that. Systems spend 98% of their time perpetuating themselves and leveling out anybody who is causing any disruption to the system.

TV: I know this is a very hard question to answer . . . maybe there is no solution . . . but what is the answer to all this? How can we stop people's brains from being turned to tapioca by TV?

Ellison: There is no answer and there is no way to stop it. We are as we have always been. The apologists again will say that things are no different now than they have ever been. The mass of people have always been drones. I suppose that it's true, but there is no *need* that it be so. I mean, we have, existent in our time, the paperback book, which has totally revolutionized life for everyone. For the first time, anyone on this planet has accessible—at a reasonable price, within his means—the totality of human knowledge, from the dawn of recorded history until today. Instead, they go for television, because television supersedes and transcends all other media. It makes it easy to sit and be entertained. One need not struggle to absorb the things you need to get through the day. The answer is, I suppose—if there is an answer, and again it's an incomplete and inadequate answer, a chancy answer—there are cynical optimists, there are Zorros among us. There are always Zorros among us. There will always be Jonas Salks; there will always be Albert Einsteins, Ralph Naders, Margaret Meads. There will always be shit-kickers who will go against the grain. And they will in some way impede, to a very small measure, the progress from snowballing. They will keep it slowed down. I don't think it can be stopped. People left to their own devices will opt for the easiest way, and that is usually the dumbest way. But there will always be Messiahs. Unfortunately, most of them turn out to be Rev. Jim Joneses or Adolph Hitlers, Anita Bryants or Richard Nixons, because power does that to you. Any kind of power. You give some guy on the road an orange coat and a flag, and he suddenly gets fucking crazed with power. Ever notice that? A perfectly ordinary guy. That's because he's been on the bottom all his life, and now he can stop that Cadillac. He can stop that Rolls-Royce.

TV: It's like the Disney cartoon where Goofy goes crazy once he gets behind the wheel of a car . . . it's the same thing. Speaking of power, the religious organizations are out doing television on their own terms. They're doing more and more spectacular productions.

Ellison: They've got unlimited funds, and it's scary. You know, you see it here. You see the PTL Club, and the 700 Club, and you say, "Oh, God—they're awful! They're ghastly!" And you turn the channel . . . you know, a rerun of Gilligan's Island is better than that shit. But you go to Montana or South Carolina or small towns, and that's all they've got. From morning to night on three channels, from 6:00 in the morning until noon, until the game shows go on. That's all there is on TV. They do it at night, late at night. They do it on radio. They've got their own satellite. They've got whatever they want. They can broadcast "perfect" productions anywhere, all over the world. And you can't stop them. You know, I'm constantly reminded of Margaret Mead's remark about the more religion a culture has, the lower its intellectual level. And she had graphs and statistics, and you could see it was true.

TV: Back on the idea of us being unable to stop the snowball, and those visionaries who try to slow it down a little bit: obviously, you were trying to do that 10 or 15 years ago.

Ellison: Well, I still do . . . but not in television anymore.

TV: It seems like in your Strange Wine[2] piece that you said you were going to give up. You were tired of fighting producers, networks and all that.

Ellison: That's an over-simplification. I *haven't* given up. What I have given up is cooperating with them in any way. Let me put it to you this way: you see, my philosophy about television is a very simple one. It is not the quality of the material on television that makes it necessarily bad. It's the medium itself, which is what I said in the introduction to Strange Wine. This isn't my philosophy wholely and solely. It comes out of 30 years of studies. People talk about television now as if it were Terra Incognita, and we don't really know anything about it, as if we didn't have any studies or actual statistics. But we do. We know. Johns Hopkins [Institute] just finished a huge, 20-year study of television on people. Clearly, it distorts the imagination. It turns people into drones—it's an opiate. That's what it does; that's what it is.

TV: We think it depends upon how you use it. Granted, if you were to use it like three or five hours a day, you . . .

Ellison: (Angrily) That's the same argument I get from everybody! I get it from idiots and I get it from intellectuals—it's the same argument! Look—you know human beings. You have seen human beings. You have observed them. You give them a gun—they will fire it. Potato chips—*television is potato chips!* You can't eat just one. Yes, you may be able to turn off television after an hour. I may be able to turn off television after an hour. But most people can't! Now we'll get down to the nitty-gritty and we'll see how honest you are: haven't you sat many, many nights and started maybe at 5:00 and maybe wind up at 11:30, watching the late show?

TV: I don't think "many, many" nights. That's my honest answer.

Ellison: "Many", then?

TV: Rarely, at least nowadays; we just don't have the time.

Ellison: Even if it's one day out of your life, it shows the potential . . . because you're an intelligent person and you're prepared to fight it! I despise it! And it catches me, too—that's the nature of the beast.

TV: Well, you must admit that there are a couple of good things on every week, especially in LA . . . almost always, anyway.

Ellison: Sure, there's lots of good stuff and I would watch it, but I find that I don't have the time to watch it. I have too much other stuff to do. I'm working in the world too much.

TV: That's why we use our Betamaxes so often. We can't stay home and watch the shows, either. But we can turn the machine on, via timer, and go out and live. What kind of TV shows do you like? You mentioned the news earlier, but you've got to have some favorites.

Ellison: Well, I'll tell you something: I haven't had a TV set on in six months, once I realized how bad it was. Once I had a clear understanding of how bad it was I didn't watch it anymore.

TV: And yet the ratings still say that a lot of people watch these crummy shows.

Ellison: Okay, but one place they never get the ratings—and this is a place where TV is watched the most—is hotels. I was in Seattle . . . let's see, three nights. In the hotel room with nothing to do, and there, waiting . . . in my room, the television! A big brand-new 21-inch set with a built-in AM/FM radio. I turned on the FM, found the classical station when I was unpacking and never turned the TV on. Not once in three days! When I came back at night after lecturing, after eating and all that—you know, how you turn it on to keep you company—I didn't do it. I turned on the classical music, got out a book and was as happy as a fucking bug. They were some of the happiest nights I've ever spent in a hotel.

TV: It's been our experience, at least with most of the videophiles we know, that most of us don't really turn on the TV as a night-light or to have company or whatever. We only turn it on to *watch* it . . . really watch and enjoy it. I often have music on . . . gotta have some bit of media going on in the background. TV, however, is a different thing. I can't even write a letter with the TV on because it is so distracting. It's just like you say . . . it sucks you in. It's like when people lecture and there's a TV set in the same room . . .

Ellison: The people watch the TV sets.

TV: Exactly. As you said in Strange Wine, when the teacher wanted to get attention from her students, she'd just turn the set on. Even though it only had snow on it, all the students would become mesmerized and would watch it—they'd quiet down and shut up. But at the same time, we honestly hope and believe that breakthroughs like home VTR's and the videodisc will change the way TV is now, enough that with any luck, things will get a lot better.

Ellison: Listen, if you would like me to testify as to the benefits of Betamax, I'll come out as a TV authority [in the lawsuit]. I mean, for me, Betamax has been a salvation.

"It is not the quality of the material on television that makes it necessarily bad. It's the medium itself . . ."

TV: The only problem is that for every Harlan Ellison Sony could find, MCA would find another Lew Wasserman or other industry official. For example, when they had Card Walker, the head of Disney, on the stand they asked him, "what do you think the Betamax will do to your company?" And he replied, basically, "it will mean the downfall of Walt Disney Productions if it's allowed to continue." But at any rate, we're hoping that, with videotape, the people can finally free themselves from the networks.

Ellison: That's what I've done. But you know, I can't bear to tape movies that have been cut.

TV: Censorship is a real problem. We get increasingly upset by some LA stations that cut great movies to shreds.

Ellison: . . . to shreds, and I can't believe it. One day—what was it that I was watching?—it was a fine film that was in a two-hour slot on an afternoon, I believe it was a Saturday. The movie was only 95 minutes long, so they didn't have to cut it: but they cut seven or eight minutes out of it. It was very, very disappointing to me. I'm very selective about what I tape. Like I'll tape the 1941 Sea Wolf with Robinson and Garfield; I taped The Big Clock with Ray Milland and Charles Laughton. Things like that—the ones I really remember, the ones I want copies of. You know, those films are

of virtually no financial worth to any of the people who made them. Most of them are dead or out of business now. But if you have them on a Betamax, you're going to [watch them] because you know it's better than the stuff that's on the tube.

TV: True, plus you can avoid the commercials from the tube, too—like Cal Worthington and his dog Spot, or Tom "CalStereoNow" Campbell [two particularly obnoxious local advertisers].
Ellison: Yeah. Now if they could only develop a system that can automatically cut out commercials.

TV: They have one for black and white programs, but they don't have one for color yet.[3]
Ellison: You mean, it automatically can tell where a commercial is?

TV: It senses the difference between color commercials and black and white shows, but it can't work with color shows. The only thing you can use to cut out commercials in

"In point of fact, television is infinitely less daring now than it was 25–30 years ago."

a color show, other than your own index finger, is a trained orangutan.[4] But you know, most of our television viewing is on tape. We hate to watch, for example, Saturday Night Live because of NBC's terrible commercial breaks every 10 minutes, so at least we can avoid that.
Ellison: You mean, you tape the whole thing, then you fast-forward . . .

TV: Right, fast-forward past every commercial. That's part of the lawsuit, by the way.
Ellison: Are you personally being sued?

TV: No, but some of us are witnesses and may eventually be sued. I don't know.
Ellison: By whom?

TV: Universal.
Ellison: For doing what?

TV: Well, about two years ago, Universal realized that there are a lot of people out there with these videotape recorders, and they're taping Universal movies and TV shows among other things off the air and they're watching them on tape. Some of them are keeping them and even inviting friends over to watch them. And because they have them on tape, they'll never again watch them off the air. And never again will they go to a theatre to see them. So as a result, they are slowly chipping away at Universal's financial structure—in theory, anyway. They're going against the system. This is not the way things are "supposed" to be; it also goes against the ratings. You watch something on tape—even if you delay it like by watching Saturday Night Live on Sunday morning—you're not going to be counted in the ratings, if you're a Neilson family.[5]
Ellison: I don't think that they have a prayer of winning because what they're trying to do is monopolize. You can't do that. There's no way to stop home taping.

TV: Ah, but there is. Universal decided to sue Sony, the instigator of the home video revolution, and in their opening arguments they are calling for the immediate destruction and removal of all Betamax machines and videocassettes on the market. And when I was called to testify, they got about 30 tapes away from me.
Ellison: Why did you loan them any of your tapes?

TV: Because they subpoenaed them. What can I say? Can I thumb my nose at a U.S. District Judge? Nope—can't do that.
Ellison: You mean, they can come into my home and take my Betamax?

TV: No, it won't go that far, but there could be a day someday when you can't buy any more blank tape. It'd be like trying to get Edsel parts.
Ellison: Do you think the problem is . . . well, first of all, they want to get into it for themselves?

TV: That's part of the story. MCA has come out with a video disc, a system that allows you only to play back programs; you can't record anything with it. So this way they can sell you a movie for $16 and they can get their dollar or two profit out of it. It's their way of carving a niche for themselves in the future.
Ellison: I can see why they would have to fight the fight. But they haven't got a fucking prayer. A lot of innocent people are going to get crushed along the way. I hope you're not one of them.

TV: I hope not, too. But it's something we're all worried about. Several of us in The Videophile are in on it, those of us who've been subpoenaed and have given depositions and all that, so it's something we're concerned with. I hope it doesn't happen.
Ellison: This all ties in with the Roddy McDowell[6] thing, right?

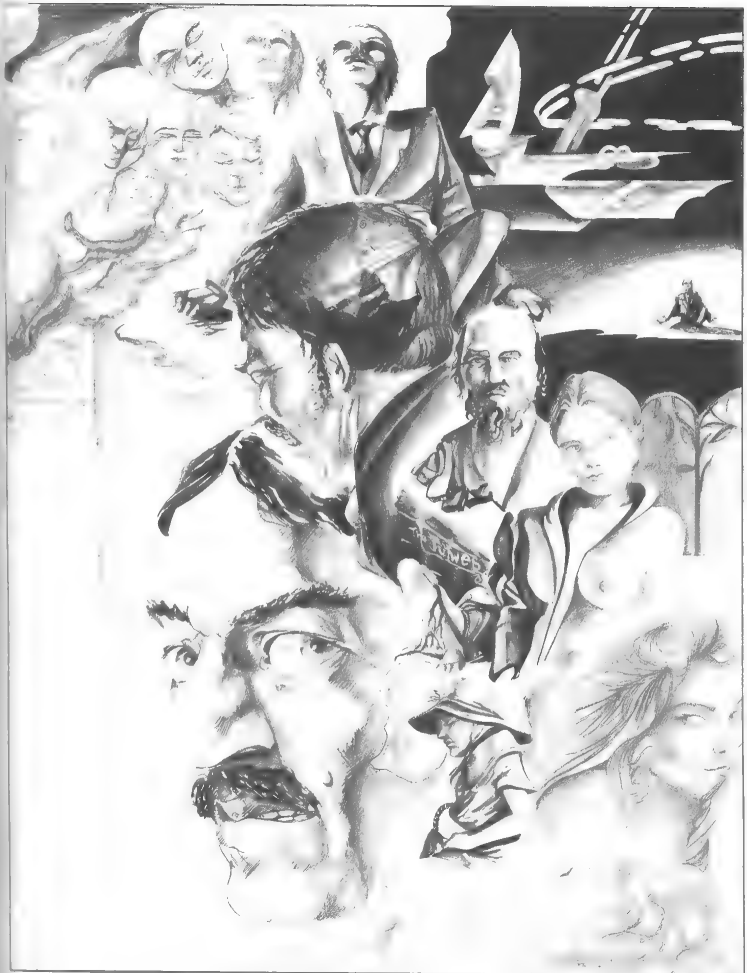
TV: I believe Roddy might have been selling films, though. But they're trying to show that a lot of people are doing this out there and this is slowly but surely going to deprive Lou Wasserman and Sid Sheinberg of the money to buy fuel for their Rolls-Royces. All those guys. They're really scared about this. Look at it this way: if you had a few Disney films on tape, you'd never go to see those in a theatre again because you can watch them all you want on your own set. You'd be able to play back all of your favorite scenes, whenever you wanted. Conceivably, if families get this stuff, they could hand it down for generations—tape lasts forever. Children can watch them, your children's children can watch them, grandchildren, the neighbor's kids. So it's possible that nobody will ever go to see a Disney Film again, at least in a theater . . . except for die-hard animation fans like us.
Ellison: But first of all, there aren't going to be that many people who'll do it. I don't think they'll have to worry about it. People will always go to a theater. Taking a kid to see Pinocchio—it's an event. It's like taking a kid to the ballet for the first time.

TV: But still, people are spending a lot of time at home, more nowadays than years ago. Things like Betamaxes and large-screen TV's are making people think they don't need theaters any more. It costs $4.50 to go to the Chinese Theater [a large downtown Hollywood movie theater]; it's hard to park, you have to sit with audiences who are talking, coughing and spilling buttercorn down your back. Why put up with that? Why not just watch it at home in the comfort of your living room?
Ellison: Why, in fact, not?

TV: Are you the type of guy who goes to movies regularly?
Ellison: I see 300 films a year.

TV: Well, you obviously get upset with people who are rude in audiences. We've heard how some of the members of the Writers' Guild used to be very rowdy at their screenings. They'd sit there booing and hissing at movies they were previewing while the creators were in the audience; how rude that was! If I ever wrote or directed a movie, I'd hate to stand around and listen to the writers going, "oh, what a piece of shit. Godamnighty, how could they waste the film on that?"
Ellison: You must mean the night I made them all sit down again.

2. Strange Wine (Harper & Rowe, 1979). "Revealed at last! What killed the dinosaurs! And you don't look so terrific yourself."—Essay on TV
3. See this issue's installment of "Ask THE VIDEOPHILE" for new color "commercial killer" soon to be released by THE CABLE WORKS.
4. Ibid.
5. According to a new Arbitron ratings report, they may start counting delayed video tape viewings of a program if it occurs within 24 hours of the original broadcast.
6. Prominent actor who was questioned by the FBI some years ago in connection with a film piracy case. Charges against him were eventually dropped.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TV: Sit down again? You mean they were all standing up?
Ellison: What they always do is they stand up and start to walk out while the end credits are rolling, so the people who are sitting and watching the credits can't see the movie. It was the night of The Gambler. They all got up and started to leave, and I said, very loud, "SIT DOWN! SIT DOWN AND SEE WHO GAVE YOU THIS WONDERFUL MOVIE!" Everybody sat down for about four minutes, and then they said, "wait a minute . . . who . . .?" And then they got defiant and got up and walked out. But I made them all sit down.

TV: We hate it when people do that in theaters, too. Maybe they should all be strapped in.
Ellison: I've stopped going to commercial theaters on weekends. I used to go a lot; now, apart from screenings, the theaters I most patronize are the NuArt, Fox Venice and The Sherman.

TV: All the reissue theaters.
Ellison: Yeah; because I'll catch up on things't've missed. I can see a double-bill of The Horse's Mouth and something else that I want to see, and it's terrific.

TV: The Z Channel [pay-cable] is also good.
Ellison: Z Channel is dynamite: they're doing 1900, The Driver. They're doing Madame Rosa, The Third Man. They're doing a lot of good things . . . that's terrific. I can tape those films and keep them for myself.

TV: Don't tell Universal!
Ellison: If they give me any shit, I'll give them more fucking trouble than they ever thought they had.

TV: We wish they had subpoenaed you. You'd be much better at fighting them than we are.
Ellison: I'm suing ABC-TV and Paramount on their Future Cop . . .

TV: Yeah, that was your "Brillo" story.
Ellison: It's a $3,000,000 suit, and we're doing very well on it. This is a big, big suit. Henry Holmes and Gunther Schiff are my attorneys, and you know what killers they are. Gunther just got Universal for $11,000,000 out of court on Mario Puzo's suit on Earthquake. They're terrified of him. He's a heavyweight. We're definitely going to win. I mean, I don't even have a moment's hesitation in saying that we are definitely going to win. It's just a case of how big I want to win, and what I want to do to them; they already wanted to settle out of court for a lot of money, and I told them to put that up their noses.

TV: Maybe they'll give you a free videodisc player.
Ellison: (grinning evilly) I want their fucking blood! Anyway, my attorney talked to me about this Star Wars/Galactica thing. They've got a clear-cut case. They've got Universal by the balls! I said, "it doesn't matter that they're both space opera. The crux of it is what you would call a superimposed pre-continuum. It's a matter of ambience. It captured the same style, and that, it seems to me is, if not copyrightable, at least protectable under law." So Schiff was talking to one of Lucas' attorneys, and they said, "Oh my God, this guy sounds exactly like what we need." I mean, I know the history of science fiction all the way back to 1926 for chrissakes, and I can give them chapter and verse on the idiom and use of it and what went before. Battlestar: Ponderosa is *in fact* a direct rip-off of Star Wars, which ain't that original, either.

TV: It isn't even a very good rip-off.
Ellison: I despise Star Wars, too, but I despise thugs who steal, like Glen Larson, more. I mean, his whole career has been one imitation after another, all the way from The Four Preps on to B.J. and the Bear.

TV: He even rips himself off on Galactica with Buck Rogers—a terrible movie. Meanwhile, Universal is saying that Lucas copied their Silent Running in their counter-lawsuit.
Ellison: It really is a snake-pit out there. These people not only have very little ethics or morality, they have virtually no creative instincts. It's the bottom line—it's always the bottom line on the payroll that they worry about. (angrily) This is no way to run an art form! Pauline Kael said this is an art form run by businessmen. Television, in that respect, is the kind of medium in which a Glen Larson and a Sid Sheinberg can flourish. They wouldn't last fifteen minutes in a medium that demanded originality, stern ethics, and a sense of responsibility. Their responsibility is to their stockholders and themselves . . . to make money. That's what they look for.

TV: Getting back to the problem of television taking over people's minds, isn't it easier for people like us who work in TV to get away from it than for people who have to work, say, in the office or a factory putting in the "9 to 5"? Maybe they need that when they get home.
Ellison: No! They don't need that! What did they do before they had television?

TV: They had radio . . . plays . . .
Ellison: Yes, but radio is a participatory activity, like books. There was conversation; there's no such thing now. People eat their dinner with the TV set going. Why do you think we have a rise in fast foods in this country? You know, I do an enormous amount of traveling around this country. But no matter what city or town I go into, it all looks the same. It all looks like Ventura Boulevard. It's got your Taco Bell, it's got your McDonald's, it's got your Burger King. It's got the motels, the bowling alleys, the Safeways, the shopping malls . . . that whole thing. And that is what has become "the country." There is virtually no identity left in any part of this nation.

TV: It's all mediocrity.
Ellison: Exactly—it's all been leavened out. And not leavened out at the level of Proust, but at the level of McDonald's shitburgers.

TV: "Harold Robbins country."
Ellison: Exactly! Now you say, "isn't TV good for people because it gives them that 'going away' thing." No, definitely no! People say, "I gotta have escape." That's bullshit! We spend 90% of our day in escape! If it isn't escape into religion, it's escape into dope. If it isn't escape into dope, it's escape into sex. If it isn't sex, it's cheap paperbacks. If it isn't cheap paperbacks, it's TV. Television, movies, newspapers—there are a million different escapes—a million different areas—and that's all we do. We are a lemming race hell-bent on being entertained and

". . . television is potato chips! You can't eat just one."

distracted constantly. Thus, we never confront the real world, which gets uglier and uglier because those who are manipulating the real world to their own ends, in whatever little areas, have us totally at their command. We stumble around like those stunned by the hammer. Television keeps you in that soporific state. It keeps you stunned. I've been saying this now for a number of years. Ten or twelve years ago in The Glass Teat I was saying something else; it took me years to learn. I shouldn't have been so stupid. I should have learned sooner. I'm not that bright, but I did finally learn. Now I'm speaking out. What I'm saying now is a very different thing than I was saying before; but if you look at the continuity of the things I was saying, all the way from 1962, when I got to LA to write for TV, to The Glass Teat, to the various magazines, to today, you'll see a steady progression, a steady drift, across the spectrum from, "gee, television is not so good, but I'll change it from within," which of course is self-duplicity. You know, you lie to yourself so you can keep getting that fat paycheck and say "I am doing some good." You're not doing any good! In fact, you're doing worse, because the better you work, the better you write, it means the more interesting those shows will be and the more people will watch. The more they watch, the more hooked they become and the more bad you are doing. I mean, it's the "Howard Beale" syndrome.

TV: Still, sometimes the best-written shows don't get the best ratings, and sometimes the worst shows get great ratings—like Three's Company, that's not exactly brilliant television fare.

Ellison: The mass taste has been steadily bastardized for so long that we turn to Gilligan's Island and Supertrain and Love Boat and Fantasy Island and Charlie's Angels and Laverne & Shirley. The very thing we're talking about: (in Archie Bunker-type voice) "Gee, I worked all day in the foundry and I wanna come home tonight, and I don't wanna worry about them taking away my home. I don't wanna worry that my kids are dope addicts. I don't wanna worry that my wife is trapped all day in the house and fucking the milkman. I don't wanna worry. Turn on the TV!"

That is not life. People should be kept from that . . .

TV: ". . . dependence?"

Ellison: Yeah, but it's more than that. It's pulling the wool over their own eyes.

TV: It's like what you talked about in Strange Wine, the people are accepting TV's fantasies as reality.

Ellison: It's a cleaning up of all the images. They do something like The Chicago Teddy Bears and the '30s gangsters.

TV: Or like Hogan's Heroes and the fun of World War II.

Ellison: They clean up everything because you cannot present reality on television. They program with what they refer to themselves as "least resistance programming." That means you reach the most people in the least troubling way. And anything that gets close to the bone, they throw out. I mean, they think Soap is daring! Soap doesn't compare with the mildest page of Collete, DeMaupassant or Balzac and that's 200 years ago. I just couldn't be a party to it any more . . . and you say you want to work in TV! Well, I can't say to you, "gee, that's terrific, I wish you well." I don't wish you well. I hope you fail miserably. I hope you find something else to do, because I think working in TV is the worst possible thing anyone can do. In the colleges I go to, that's what people are going into. They're not becoming doctors any more, or physicists; they want to get into "the media." The media classes, the television classes, are the biggest classes on any campus because it is, first of all, bullshit mickey-mouse classes where you don't have to do that much work, you don't have to study. It's all off the top of the head, it's all associated with glamour. The only thing that saves it for me is that most of the people are going to fail in the process.

TV: Half of them are going to stay in Sioux City, Iowa, and they'll never make it to Hollywood, anyway. And most of the people we knew in school gave up on careers in the industry long ago. But getting back to discussing fantasy and all that, we heard you did a Flying Nun script a few years ago. What was that show about? We didn't see it.

Ellison: Hardly anybody did. Everybody always asks about that as if there is something strange about me writing a Flying Nun. I mean, I've also written comic books, and no one finds that peculiar. Anyway, the way I got to it was there was a guy who had been my personal manager about '65 or '66, a guy from Australia who worked for me six months and clipped me for about $10,000, and I got rid of him immediately. Well, a few months later he called me after he got himself in at Screen Gems, and wanted to square away things with me. For doing The Flying Nun, they'd pay x-amount of thousands of dollars—in those days it wasn't much for situation comedies. I didn't have any comedy credits, I had written Burke's Law, which was as close to it as I'd gotten. I figured that yeah, I'd like to write a comedy. So I went down and saw the pilot and it was marvelous. It was called "The Last Pelican" or "The First Pelican" or something like that. Sally Field knocked me out, and I wanted to get next to her. I figured that if I liked the show, there was a chance that I'd get to meet Sally Field. Now that may seem to a lot of people as, you know, an ignoble reason to do it.* They'd much prefer to say that I did it for the money. I didn't do it for the money, I did it to meet Sally Field, and I did it because I enjoyed the show. I wrote a very funny script. The writing of it was very difficult because I had been in a street fight and got busted up pretty badly out in Milford, Pennsylvania. I was in the hospital writing it with a typewriter on my lap while Billy Sackheim, the producer, kept calling and screaming, "Where's my script? Where's my script?" Both my hands were bandaged, and I was typing with my thumbs; it was really difficult. But I wrote it, and I wrote a very funny, *Jewish Flying Nun*. It was that kind of thing, and they, of course, couldn't let the script go as it was. It was a nice little script called "You Can't Get There from Here." Nice little episode. But they fucked it around and wanted it re-written. They hired Rocky and Irman Kalish, who are very well-known television writers. And the Kalishes called me and said, "My God, we don't want to touch the script—it's beautiful! So, we're going to tinker around with it a little and give it back to them. We're not really going to change the script." Of course, Sackheim got furious when they sent it back, so what Screen Gems did was cut out half my show and run flashbacks of earlier shows. I took my name off it and put the name "Cordwainer Bird" on it. It was one of three times that I did that.

*Not me boy, I can hardly imagine a more noble motivation.—Ed

TV: The first time you did that was on Voyage, right?

Ellison: Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea. The second time was The Flying Nun, and the third time was on The Starlost.

TV: We saw that Voyage episode a few months ago and noticed your name on the front of it, or rather, "Cordwainer Bird" 's name.

Ellison: They ran it?

TV: On KTLA, not too long ago.

Ellison: Damn—I missed it. You see, I don't have copies of any of those things. I don't have the Alfred Hitchcock I wrote. I don't have any of the Burke's Laws.

TV: Those are sometimes shown in Tampa, and the Hitchcocks are now on in LA: they're generally great shows. Did you work with Irwin Allen on that idea for Voyage?

Ellison: I was called in on a cattle call. This was 1964; I had been in town two years, and I was scuffling. I didn't have any money. They had a cattle call, and my agent said that a new series called Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea was happening and to go see it. I went to see it, and it was dumb. But those were the early days and I was writing TV and would write anything, and I was anxious to work. So I came up with an idea and I rushed back to his office while everybody else was still watching the pilot, so I was the first writer in his office. I told him the story and he said he liked it, so I wrote it. Well, he fucked it around. [shows us 18 drafts of the script]

TV: How much did they change it?

Ellison: They changed everything . . . I mean, it was ridiculous. The whole thing was changed so completely that it bore no relation to what I had originally written.

TV: If they changed it so much, what's the purpose of having a good original idea? Why don't they just do it themselves?

Ellison: That's right! But they're too lazy—they can't write. See, they're not writers.

TV: You're saying they can only re-write.

Ellison: Right. Give them something and they can tell you why it's wrong! You see, they haven't got the ability to dream the dream in the first place, and they hire you and pay you a lot of money to buy that dream from you, but then they have to establish that they are in control. They're power nuts! All of these people are crazy, power nuts! Once in awhile you'll find a power nut who's got the talent—a Robert Altman, or a Fellini. They're all on a power trip. But some of them have the humanity and the vision, and with them you'll sometimes get good film and acceptable television. Most of the time, what you've got are people who have no sense of craft, they're imitators. Now, Irwin Allen, who just directed The Swarm . . .

"Delusion for a Dragon Slayer"

A terrible movie.

Ellison: My God, a terrible movie! And not just terrible because it's a stupid movie from the start, but because it's totally illogical! The characterization comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. The characters are introduced and nothing's done with them. Irwin lives with the special effects. He's got this glandular condition in his films which has always existed, back all the way to the time he was doing The Story of Mankind.[7] He'd get 500 old has-been actors and throw them all together and say, "Ok, here's a movie." And he thinks that movies will pull money into the theater. Well, apparently, The Swarm lost a lot of money and I am delighted. I hope it's the end of Irwin's career because this man has single-handedly made it difficult to make small films. I mean, when he had a couple of films that made a lot of money, like The Poseidon Adventure and Towering Inferno, everybody said, "Ah, this is the way to go."

We are a lemming race hell-bent on being entertained and distracted constantly."

Poseidon Adventure was the one that really turned everything around.

Ellison: Precisely—that was Irwin Allen's fault to us.

We've heard varying reports about you throwing people out windows, punching them out or breaking someone's back . . . These rumors. What's the story on that? What did you really do to Irwin Allen?

Ellison: I didn't touch Irwin.

You didn't touch him?

Ellison: It was the head of ABC Continuity.

Oh, he probably should be punched.

Ellison: He's dead now. His name was Adrian Samish.

Oh, we saw his name all the time on The Invaders.

Ellison: Yeah, he worked for Quinn Martin. I went to Q-M after he left ABC. I mean, that is what they do—they move from place to place. And nothing succeeds like failure. Samish was the head of ABC network continuity; he was the censor. Irwin called me to a meeting. He really liked me and knew I was writing. He wanted me to do story shows for him. I was going to become one of his regular stable. (with irony) My God! That was before the early drafts of the script; then he found out that I wasn't going to cooperate. Anyway, he called me in and this guy started in on me and wanted me to do a lot of really stupid things.

TV: What kind of changes did they want?

Ellison: (reflecting) We're talking now of 14 years ago; it's very hard for me to remember. Well, there's a scene in the script where there's a beautiful woman on-board the Seaview, who's a spy. She pulls a gun on Richard Basehart and she's going to blow up the sub and escape in the mini-sub or whatever they've got, and everybody else dies. Well, I go to this meeting and it's in a room in Irwin Allen's office with a very long conference table so he can act like a "big massa." At one end is me and at the other end is Adrian Samish . . . a very long, shining table. All of Irwin's yes-men are down the sides of the table. There's a big model of the Seaview on the wall behind Samish, one of the scale models they used and he had it put on brackets on the wall and there it hung. This guy started saying things to me, and he was very, very stupid. I mean, they were more stupid than you can believe—really insipid! But the one that finally got me was when he said, "I have this wonderful idea." This was around the time From Russia with Love came out. "The commander should grab for her, and he grabs her by the face and it rips away, and we find that she's not beautiful—she's hideously ugly underneath." I said, "Look, this woman has been making love to people on the sub for months during this voyage. They've been hugging, kissing and touching her, and you're saying they don't know she had a rubber face?" They could be horny, but they couldn't possibly be that bad off. He said, "you can figure a way around that."

I said, "There is no way around that! You people are always telling me I can find a way around that—but there is no way around that! It's a stupid idea!" He replied, "well, I saw it in From Russia with Love, and I liked it." I said, "I saw it in From Russia with Love, too, and I liked it there, but I don't like it here." I said that it was stupid and wouldn't work. He said, "Look, you just do it. Don't tell me what's stupid." I said, "What the fuck do you mean, 'do it'?" He said, "You writers are just toadies. You just do as you're told."

(grinning evilly) And I went for him. I jumped on the chair and ran down the length of the table, slipped, fell, and slid along the table. I hit him right in the mouth as hard as I could. He went over backwards out of the chair; the Seaview came down on him and broke his pelvis! (laughter) And I didn't work on any ABC shows for five or six years. He killed $30,000 worth of scripts. But that's fine. I don't object to that. Revenge is okay; I can dig revenge.

TV: We heard you were really into revenge—that you're still working on grudges from 1937.

Ellison: Yeah, people who fuck me around, I get them. Basically, I'm as nice and as kind as anyone else. But you come into my yard and fuck with me, I'm gonna . . . it's not just an eye for an eye. I'm gonna take off both your arms and you're going to walk with a limp for the rest of your life. That's the way I am about it.

TV: We also have a note here that you wrote an unproduced Batman script.

Ellison: I did. I wrote a very good Batman script. We were going to use Two-Face [as a villain]. That was at the end of the four or five year period that I hadn't worked for ABC. I got hired at 20th to write a Batman. I was dying to write the show; it wasn't sensational, but I loved it. Anyway, [producer] Howie Horowitz signed me on. I turned in the treatment—it was a great treatment. He loved it; everybody loved it. They wanted to do it. The day that Adrian Samish was leaving ABC to go to work for Quinn Martin, whose offices were at that time at Warner Bros., I was in Howie's office at 20th and the phone rang. He automatically put it on the squawk box. It was Adrian. He said, "You can't do this Ellison script." Horowitz said, "Why not?" "Ellison is not allowed to work . . . blah, blah, blah . . ." He did a whole thing that I wasn't supposed to hear.

TV: You should've asked him, "How's your pelvis?"

Ellison: It was a gratuitous, last kick in the ass to me. I mean, it was a $1500 script—who gave a shit, you know? But he got me. Now that one I thought was gratuitous, because he had killed $30,000 worth of assignments over the years and I never complained, never said a word, never went after him. But this broke my heart. So I went down to Warner's the next day. I went to the building where Quinn Martin had his unit, and I waited in a little alcove where there was a Sparklett's water fountain and stood there right across from the door of Samish's office. (smiling) Sure enough, about 10:00, here he came walking down the hall. He didn't see me and he started to turn the doorknob. As he turned, I said, "Hey, Adrian!" and POW!, I hit him right in the mouth again. He went backwards through the door, went over the secretary's desk, knocked her sideways and went right into a waste-basket.

TV: (laughter) I think we have a great potential here for an idea that we could turn into a concept for a treatment of a great situation comedy. . . .

7. 1957 pseudo-epic well known for being a "badly cast and poorly handled film highlighting man's history with a stretch of cliched costume episodes," according to Leonard Maltin's "Movies on TV."
8. 1975 feature version of Ellison's Hugo Award winning novella starring Don Johnson, Jason Robards, and Susanne Benton. A big SF cult film about a war-desolated earth in the future.
9. Ariel: The Book of Fantasy, Volume 2 (1977): "Eggsucker," a book/magazine, now distributed commercially by Ballentine Books and available in most good paperback book stores nationally.

Ellison: And that took care of that. It's funny that you'd ask about the one thing and the other, because they're the opening and the closing of that whole story.

TV: Well, that's amazing. You sure got the last laugh. Did he ever try to sue you or anything?

Ellison: He was going to sue me and Irwin Allen when his pelvis got broken; Irwin settled out of court. I don't know how much he gave him. I heard that's what happened.

TV: It was nice that Irwin paid for it.

Ellison: Irwin was protecting his own ass. He wasn't doing it for me.

TV: Samish sounds like a real jerk.

Ellison: He was not actually like one of the censors. He was kind of a liaison. He thought he was the czar of writing.

TV: We wanted to ask you about some script ideas that never worked out. They looked pretty good in the beginning when you talked about them at conventions. You once spoke at a convention about an NBC show of A Boy and His Dog.[8] What ever happened to that? That's about the most bizarre idea for a TV show we've ever heard.

Ellison: (nodding) Very bizarre. L.Q. Jones sold it to NBC without asking me, and before I knew it I was in bed with him—you know, business-wise—and doing a pilot script for a two-hour movie for the network, and I thought it was crazy. Oddly enough, I was able to produce a script that maintained the original concept and had the characters. It was based on . . . you see, A Boy and His Dog is only part of the story . . . there's a prequel called "Eggsucker" which was published in Ariel[9] a few months ago. It's a marvelous little story. Boy and his Dog was what I wrote first. "Eggsucker" is a prequel in terms of time: it kind of sets the mood for A Boy and His Dog, which comes after. It was all intended to be part of one novel. "Blood's a Rover" introduces a female character who is a rover, the equivalent of Vic. She's tougher and meaner than he is! It was one hell of a good script. I am wild about it. I think it is dynamite. It's fun; it's mean, it's inventive; it's strange; it's unlike anything they've done on television. It has a different look and feel—and it's gritty and very nice.

TV: What happened? You seemed so convinced it'd really happen.

Ellison: (sadly) I was convinced it was going to go and everyone else was, too. NBC loved it. The problem was Jones—L.Q. Jones. He had deluded himself into thinking that he had created A Boy and His Dog. He couldn't recognize the fact that it was my concept, my dream. He always thought there was a big difference between his view of what A Boy and His Dog was and mine. They were basically the same, but when he started to deviate from what I had written and put his own stuff in, he went flat. When he stayed with where I was and interpreted his way, it was fine . . . because he didn't understand plotting that well. So when I did the script, the network loved it! It was one of those rare occasions where usually a producer loves it and sends it to the networks and they make him rewrite it; in this case, the network loved it. There were three or four minor changes; otherwise, they liked it so much that we had started out with the concept that it was a two-hour movie. During the process of my writing it, they had a change of heart and said, "no, we want it 90 minutes;" but when the script came in, they said, "we'll do it two hours." That's how much they liked it. But L.Q. Jones didn't like it, and the project was tied up with him. I couldn't move without him. He couldn't move without me, and the network couldn't move without both of us. So they were locked in with him and he began fighting it and undermining it. He called up the network and said, "This isn't working. Ellison is giving me shit," things like that. Simcom International, the production company, had also been undermined, thought I was a madman, and until everything that he did started going

Melissa C. Beckman

"I think working in TV is the worst possible thing anyone can do."

"Blind Lightning"

STORY ©1967 HARLAN ELLISON

long, they began to perceive that it wasn't me, it was him! Finally, I talked to someone who used to be at the network at that time, and I asked, "What happened? Whatever happened?" He said, "We never thought Jones could deliver."

It was Jones who killed it. It broke my heart. I own the property, but I can't move without him. We're still in business together. He's got sequel rights. I've got people who are trying to buy it away from him now and maybe, once I get it free from him, maybe I'll be able to get it on the air. It's a lovely, lovely, lovely script. I mean, it is really super duper.

TV: Was the Boy and His Dog feature successful? I thought it didn't make any money, with its limited distribution and all that.

Ellison: Very successful. In fact, it made $6,500,000—not a penny of which I have ever received. I have 2 points in that picture and I've never received a dime.

TV: Oh, it's "the overhead," right?

Ellison: Yeah—Jones has been running his office the last four years. He pays his rent, he pays everything off it. If I ever want to go to court against him, I'm sure I could pin him and eventually get him to declare bankruptcy and collect and get my money. He's stiffed me for everything.

TV: That's too bad. You seemed very close to him at the convention, you said then you were very pleased with the movie.

Ellison: I was very pleased with the movie , with reservations about the sexism in it. Although he did a very, very good job. I don't think anyone else would have had the sense to undertake such a film; you have to love that story to want to do it. He did it very well indeed, but L.Q. is not a very nice man. He's like me, he's an individualist who wants to be in charge. That's fine, as long as you don't have someone else equally as headstrong who wrote the original material, and since I wrote the original material my primary interest supersedes all else.

TV: You didn't write the script to the movie, though.

Ellison: I wrote the first seven minutes. The funniest line in the movie—where the woman is lying cut up on a table and the kid says, "Ah, shit, why did they have to do that to her? She could've been used again." That's my line. And the dog says, "War is hell, Albert."

A lot of people are going to do unadjusted gross. You start making money from "penny-one." That's the way to go.

TV: So they don't wait until one certain amount is reached before they pay you your percentage?

Ellison: From the first ticket sold, you get your take.

TV: That's great—that's the way it should be. You mentioned Man Without Time; it sounds like a great title for a series. What is it? Kind of a "Time Tunnel" show.

Ellison: It was a series about a man who moves all through history—all through the past—two great forces fighting through time. One of them is altering the past.

TV: I see—the hero's got to "de-alter" it. Like someone who is going to try to save Lincoln and he's gotta make sure that someone is killed so that the progression of events will still occur as they should have.

Ellison: Yeah, but you see, the story would come from the fact that he would get very close to Lincoln and really love and admire him, but he's gotta let him die.

TV: It sounds like your "City on the Edge of Forever" episode from Star Trek.

Ellison: I did that subsequently. I took that idea and developed it. History is very interesting to me, and I thought it was a good way to show history and to have an interesting kind of hero.

TV: Irwin Allen would use stock shots for it.

Ellison: Oddly enough, Allen ripped off the idea.

TV: The Time Tunnel is exactly like that. They'd try to change the past only to find out they were part of it, part of that time-frame. And speaking of time, we're beginning to run out of it. Before we go, we wanted to ask you about some of your other "legends," like about your appearance on The Dating Game and why Chuck Barris had to burn the tape.

Ellison: I wrote that, the whole thing in its entirety. You see, I hate telling stories that have been done. They can go and find The Other Glass Teat [Pyramid Books, 1975] and find it there.

TV: The funniest part of the story is that they call you up every so often to try to get you back on the show.

Ellison: Not any more. They called me up for The Newlywed Game two days after my divorce from my third wife—we were married 45 days—and it was in all the trades. She was quite beautiful, but now she's a born-again Christian. A real Bible-thumper. She's now married to Dean Jones.

TV: Sorry to hear about that.

Ellison: They called from The Newlywed Game and asked to have us on; I said that I was just getting divorced. They said, "What? WHAT?"

TV: So we can't have the story of how you were fired from Walt Disney Productions for idly remarking in the studio commissary about how you'd like to make a hard-core pornographic movie with Mickey, Minnie, Goofy and all the gang?

Ellison: That's in the November '78 issue of Oui—"The Three Most Important Things in Life."

TV: Well, our readers can find that if they really want to read it; it's a hilarious story. "At Disney, no one fucks with the Mouse," right?

Ellison: Right.

TV: In any case, Harlan, thanks very much for the talk. We'll be sure to tell our readers to do their best to avoid TV—especially bad TV—whenever possible. It's hazardous to our brains.

Ellison: Abso-fucking-lutely.

Afterword to Ellison Interview:

Those of you who are interested in reading more about and by Harlan Ellison are advised to look for the following, at any large book store near you:

Strange Wine (Harper & Row, 1979), the latest collection of Ellison's short stories, with a short essay on television's destructive influence on the human mind.

Six Science Fiction Plays (Pocket Books, 1976), featuring Ellison's original never-filmed script for "City on the Edge of Forever," plus Harlan's side as to why NBC wouldn't let the original version get on the air.

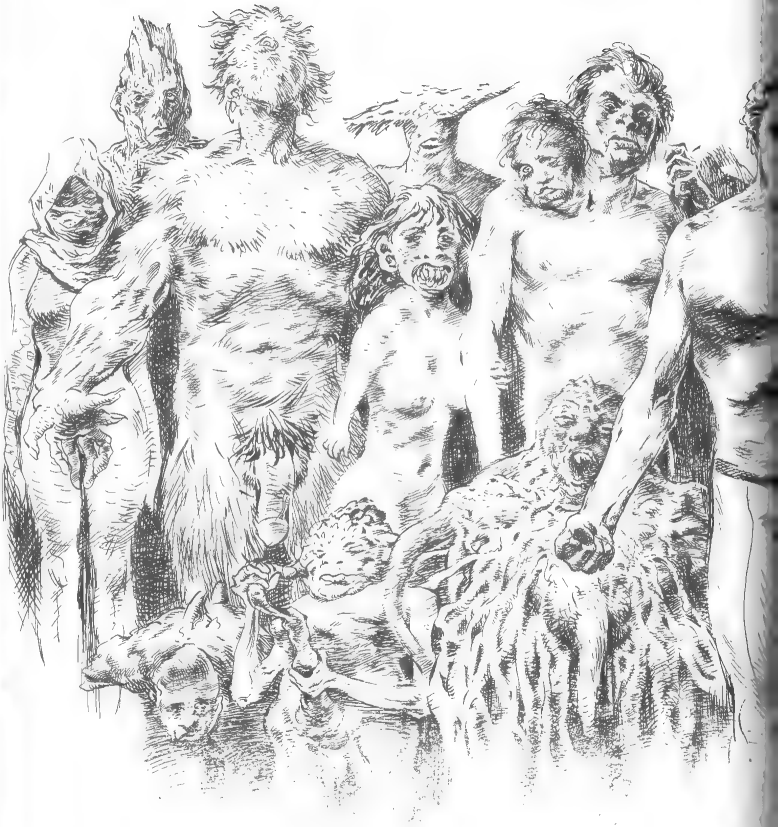
Dangerous Visions and Again, Dangerous Visions (Signet, 1972), a revolutionary multi-volumed set edited by Ellison and containing the best in new-wave speculative fiction. (And someday-to-come. The Last Dangerous Visions, capping off the award-winning series.)

The Glass Teat and The Other Glass Teat (Pyramid, 1975), a collection of "apocalyptic teevee criticism mean as Drano martinis," the latter containing the complete script to Harlan's "Whimper of Whipped Dogs" episode of The Young Lawyers (a damn fine episode of a fair-to-middling series).

The Book of Ellison (Algol Press, 1978), a collection of essays about Harlan, by several people who know him best (including himself).

And more works of fiction than we could ever possibly name. Chances are, if you find a book with Harlan's name on it, it'll be worth looking into.

Special thanks to: Mark Evanier, for much background and reference material; Alan Brennet for a book reference or two; Linda Steele, Harlan's long-suffering assistant for putting up with our many phone calls over the past few weeks; Joe Mazzini and Scott Lillie, for their Herculean help in transcribing and proofreading the entire mess; and to Harlan himself, for generously giving us his time and words for a couple of measly videocassettes. (Video/checkbook journalism is alive and living in Tinsel-Town.)



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IN THIS CORNER, wearing a typewriter and thesaurus, RBCC's featured speaker of the issue, Harlan Ellison:

"This WEIRDWORLD stuff. Oh my God! The reading of that is like reading the worst of Tolkien, which God knows is bad enough.

Just so nobody's under any misapprehension, I am up to my ass, friends, in fuzzy-footed, pointy-eared little creatures. I don't want to see no more of them. I don't give a fuck about them. I would like to see a human being in a comic book who has a problem I can identify with, instead of the search for the power gems and the lost realm of Nyrlathotep or whatever. Jesus God! Mindless garbage!"

And in the opposite corner, wearing glittering Marvelcolor, the covers of WARRIORS OF THE SHADOW REALM, proclaiming in unequivocal shouts: The Most Acclaimed Comic Saga of the Decade! Artwork to Dazzle Your Senses! Award-winning Fantasy Masterpiece! (I have yet to ascertain what award was won.)

Even THE COMICS JOURNAL joins in the hyperbolic extravaganza: Comics Take a Giant Leap into the Future!

Odds-makers would doubtless give Ellison the advantage in this shouting match. After all, who, in the Age of Marvel, can take seriously any of Marvel's self-congratulatory exuberance? In the Marvel Bullpen, "type" and "hype" are used interchangeably: words are shills that dupe the buyer into dropping his coin on the counter. Happily, in the very repetition of hype, the odor of chicanery dissipates: the endless string of superlatives clearly mocks itself, becoming vaguely satirical and sometimes decidedly tongue-in-cheek. Still, it's not an altogether harmless game. Words are robbed of import, and we're left gasping for breath amid meaningless verbal flatulence.

But Ellison is indulging in another kind of hype himself: not the exaggerated claim but the outrageous overstatement, a rhetorical flourish strategically designed to make an impression--to attract attention. Our attention riveted by such uncompromising utterances as "mindless garbage," he unwraps the substance of his argument: "I would like to see a human being in a comic book who has a problem I can identify with."

In the last analysis, Marvel is doing the same thing: cover hype attracts our attention, but it is the interior pages that will support the claims. Or not.

And now that we have before us all three issues of the most hyped comic book of the year, let's see whether it lives up to its billing.

NO QUESTION: WOTSR is a superior technical accomplishment. Few comic books in this country have ever looked as beautiful, and no publication has so successfully sustained such a lengthy effort at graphic storytelling with painted visuals. Considering the results, there can be no doubt that high quality production values were strenuously enforced--both in the drawing and painting stages and in the final printing phase.

But an evaluation of WOTSR must go beyond the mere appearance of the books. They may look better than any other color comic ever produced, but do they function efficiently, dramatically, as comic art? Is the visual/verbal nature of the medium exploited effectively? If so, then WOTSR will come closer yet to measuring up to writer Doug Moench's claim for it as "the best damn comic book ever produced."

While there is scarcely space here to do the page-by-page analysis that a thorough answer to those questions demands, one way to make a general assessment is by determining to what extent the story is advanced by the words alone, independent of the pictures. In the best comic art, words and pictures are mutually dependent, neither making complete sense without the other. These days, too many comic books rely too much on verbiage, and the pictures serve as decoration, merely illustrating the words and adding nothing substantive to the action of the story.

Unhappily, WOTSR falls frequently into this habit, too. It's most noticeable in the flashback sequences in Part I (I/26, 30-32) and Part III (III/11-15), where we need no pictures to make sense of the narrative. Given the nature of a flashback, the situation is doubtless unavoidable. But

verbal excess is evident elsewhere, too, when words tell us what the pictures clearly depict: I/19, the White Wolf is "looking right down at us"; II/13, "the Dark Riders have dismounted"; II/14, "cloak and cowl are peeled from the fleeting figure"; II/15, "they mount their powerful steeds"; III/27, "the three small folk climb into an awesome chamber."

On other occasions, words are used to tell us what pictures might more effectively accomplish. The impending attack by a swamp serpent in the 2-page spread (I/22-23) is suggested more by the captions than by the picture--thanks to a weak composition that fails to draw sufficient attention to the beast lurking ahead in the water. And on II/17 the picture of the savage elf at the bottom of the page tells us nothing of his predicament. The speech balloon does the whole job, but the savage's dilemma could have been more dramatically stated with the proper picture.

This sort of verbal embroidery is often intended by a writer to contribute to the mood or atmosphere of the story: to a writer, a creature of words, words sometimes seem to do this job better than pictures. But in a visual /verbal medium where we have pictures that can accomplish the task more economically--and usually more forcefully--such practices are excessive.

The instances I mention are not the only ones in WOTSR's 127 pages. I don't mean either to say that the pictures are overwhelmed throughout by the words. But words do more than their fair share on enough occasions to suggest either that the writer does not fully understand the medium or that the artists sometimes failed to make their pictures do enough. The evidence suggests a bit of both.

Considering the attentive editorial kibitzing on the project during its development and the care lavished on the pictures alone (which are now being promoted in art portfolios whose touted virtue is that they do not reproduce the words at all), it's ironic that WOTSR should so often rely more on words than on pictures to tell its tale.

FORTUNATELY, at least one sequence in the books shows us what the medium can do--what should have been more consistently attempted. The first pages of Part I come close to achieving the best that comic art is capable of.

The opening splash panel (I/7) sets the scene and establishes the gnarled quaintness of Weirdworld--an impression that the following 2-page spread emphatically confirms. (Though here again, the two captions are atmospheric window-dressing, contributing nothing to the substance of the story that isn't obvious in the picture or inherent in the situation.) The spread also most effectively orients us to the relative positions of the actors in the coming scenes, so that we know that the scenes on the following page are shifting between clifftop and pond. The alternating scenes of I/10 exploit the medium's ability to time action for dramatic effects--in this case, the ironic juxtaposition of Mud-butt's remark with the savage elf's leap on I/11 and the savage's unexpected arrival in the trio's midst on I/12.

Notice that the action here takes its significance from the blending of word and picture: neither makes the same narrative sense alone that both do when taken together. Here none of the action is restated ("clarified") in captions. And the narrative economy that is achieved in the visual/verbal blend contributes the drama of the sequence.

IT'S DEBATEABLE whether the action of I/11 needs a full page. In fact, two vertical panels might serve the story better: the first to show the savage's take-off; the second, his splash-down--an action that I/12's first panel is too cramped to adequately portray. (An alternative layout for I/12 is printed in TCJ 48; in it, the first panel is emphatically vertical, which seems to me a more effective use of layout for dramatic impact than the arrangement finally chosen. Still, two vertical panels for I/11 strikes me as even better: the parallelism would emphasize the height of the leap and would leave no doubt as to what it was that splashed into the pond.)

Events move briskly forward for the next couple pages, and although some of the pictured action is again annoyingly narrated to us in "voice over" fashion, at least the speeches are suitable, natural, to the occasion.

But on I/15, a dramatic opportunity is lost: the wait for the reappearance of the savage could have been drawn-out more through effective use of several silent panels. A minor matter, to be sure. But a telling one. The capability of the art form for manipulating time to create suspense or to heighten the drama of a moment is never exploited in WOTSR after I/11. I suspect that the space that might have been used in this manner was sacrificed to spectacle--to double-and triple-page spreads that sometimes used more space for their subjects than necessary for the story.

Generally speaking, Part II is the best of the three--chiefly because there's more outright continuous action, and the medium is best suited to telling action stories. The frantic chase through the streets of the City of Seven Dark Delights is well done: rapid shifts in scene and angle capture the spirit of the action in the disorienting, tumbled-up architectural surroundings. Color is marvelously used to suggest an eerie, nightmarish atmosphere, suitable to both place and events. And although there are still occasions on which the words carry too much of the story alone, vigorous action and visual variety underscore the visual character of the med-

jum, creating a visual/verbal balance that compensates for the lack of visual/verbal blend.

Without the visual emphasis of Part II, WOTSR would be a deadly piece of decorated expository writing. But Part II is an integral part of the whole, and it gives the entire tale a dramatic lift out of explanatory persiflage.

SUPERB use of color all through the books helps in this regard, too: as a visual effect, color often can offset verbal excesses. And color is used here for dramatic effects as well as for simple coloration.

Whenever the Dark Riders or Nightfangers appear, the sky turns red. The presence of the White Wolf is always signaled by a frosty blue-green glow cast over the surroundings.

Color sometimes spills out of one panel to fill the gaps between all others on a page, giving all events thereon a similar color-cued mood. By this device, the City of SDD is given its peculiarly lurid character (and mostly by this device: otherwise there's little shown but quaint and quirky buildings, hardly enough to justify the City's name and reputation).

Other individual scenes are also masterfully done--the campfire evening (I/21), our first glimpse of the City of SDD (I/36-38), the trio's trek through the cave to the tomb (III/26)--as are many of the closeups: I/15 & 19; II/14 & 29.

Moench wrote the story with color in mind, and it shows most specifically in the use of light in the magic sequences. The rainbow refraction of light through the Darklens gems is often clumsily done, but it works with glowing effect on II/36 and III/10. And the use of color and light on III/19 is striking.

But nothing can ever live up to its hype. Although the action of Part II and the dramatic use of color throughout the books do much to restore visual/verbal balance to WOTSR, they don't do enough to support editor Rick Marshall's claim for the books as "the ultimate comic strip." The potential of the medium for timing and for dramatic economy and power in visual/verbal blending is not exploited enough to support such an extravagant claim.

But WOTSR is by no means therefore a failure. When judged against the present state of the art--the other comics on the newsstand--WOTSR is a thoroughly competent piece of craftsmanship. That's nothing to scoff at. But it's not enough to rave about either, and Marvel would have been wise to mute its usual hyperbolic blather for this publication--letting the books speak for themselves. At least then we'd have no exaggerated expectations, and we'd see WOTSR for what it is: a comic book that for all its accomplishments is still much like other comic books, whose explorations of the medium's potential are too timid to advance the art of the comics--or even to exhibit the potential of that art to advantage.

But if WOTSR does not tell its story with brilliance, it does tell it with thorough-going competence much of the time.

And WOTSR has the makings of a good story--movement, pace, suspense. But at its core, it is sadly hollow: it has no heart, and therefore by its end, it has no significance.

For books with such beautiful color, the characters are curiously--infuriatingly--colorless. It may be, as Moench says, purposeful with Tyndale and Velanna. But the purpose miscarries: because they have so little personality, neither elf engages our emotions. Cuteness alone will not make us like them enough to care about what happens to them. And if we don't care, the most suspenseful story will not attract and hold our sympathies or surprise us or terrify us or involve us much at all.

Mud-butt fails similarly--but not by design. Apart from his appearance (and some echo of Goscinny's Obelix in the "crazy" refrain), Moench's attempt at a comic character is only feebly funny. The college boy wit of his remarks is brittle and unfeeling. Given ample opportunity to express some human sympathy for his companions and thereby give the story an empathetic dimension, Mud-butt seems to care nothing for anyone. And we return the favor.

A STORY THAT FAILS to engage us emotionally becomes but an intellectual game, a kind of puzzle in whose solution we can find some intellectual pleasure--the only emotion possible here.

In WOTSR, Moench tries his hand at creating mythology--tales that explain the nature of things. His elfin and dwarfish folk are but eye-witnesses to myths in the making. Traditionally simple and straightforward, mythology presents no puzzle of an intellectually challenging nature, so the intellectual rewards of the story must arise from the ingenuity of Moench's explanations.

And there is some ingenuity in Moench's combination. But

STARTING in April's Playboy.

resurrecting evil sorcerers by thrusting magic gems into various parts of their corporeal remains is a familiar ploy. And the ethics of dualism--the battle between the Prince of Darkness and the Prince of Light--has been with us in Judeo-Christian tradition for some time (dating back as much as 500-600 years B.C. to the Persian prophet, Zoroaster). It's not ingenious enough to provide the intellectual pleasure that would compensate for the tale's otherwise emotionless ramble.

But it is not so much its mindlessness that condemns the tale to mediocrity as it is its heartlessness. If we were sufficiently moved, even mundane philosophical myth would catch fire in our response to the story.

Despite its shortcomings, WOTSR must still occupy a place in the history of the artform. Apart from its use of color and the technical achievement represented in the quality of its printing, WOTSR is not particularly remarkable. But the pure spectacle of the work is a beacon, showing the way to better comic books--books more comparable to the kind of comic books Europe has been producing for years.

PUTTING IT IN PERSPECTIVE

NO ONE HAS EVER accused the human race of logical consistency and made the charge stick. For most of us, logic remains an esoteric upper division college course of study rather than a familiar aspect of everyday mental exercise. Take the funnies, for example.

The funnies in the daily newspaper haven't been just funny for a long time. Since the 30's, serious adventure as well as humorous comedy have been staple fare on comics pages, and both serious and humorous strips have matured considerably in the last 50 years. Gag strip humor these days goes beyond the slapstick comedy of the early 1900's: sophisticated, often highly inferential gags take aim at social and political issues, not just harmless human foibles. And the continuity strip keeps pace by abandoning the purely exotic adventure of the 30's in favor of more realistic, more contemporary themes.

The increasing maturity of the comics has not escaped the notice of the editors in whose papers they appear. And here even editors exhibit their fundamental humanity: with lovable human perversity, they fail to behave logically.

Out of one side of their mouths, they proclaim with pride the scope and depth of their news coverage which seeks to inform their readers of every quiver in the body politic. With similar pride, they point to the incisive analysis of their editorial pages and, even, the high quality of their features (including the comics). All of this, they claim expansively, is intended to keep readers as informed and aware as a mature citizenry should be.

YOU WERE TRYING TO SELL THE GEAR TO STEVE CANYON/ WE SHALL MAKE YOU HAPPY TO GIVE IT TO US/
WE SHALL KNOCK OUT ONE FRONT TOOTH AT A TIME—SO YOU MAY SPEAK MORE FREELY/
MEANWHILE

MOST OF THE CANYON torture scenes were no more explicit than the above.

But from the other side of the editorial mouth sometimes come wails of outrage when such a thing as a comic strip in its increased maturity reflects the real world too accurately--that same world, need I say, that the editors congratulate themselves for reflecting so accurately in the news columns. The case in point, an adventure last summer in Milton Caniff's STEVE CANYON.

In this adventure, Convoy, an old girl friend of Steve's, is captured and tortured by the notorious Madame Lynx. Steve and Johnny Mink eventually rescue the girl, and Lynx is blown up in a shipboard explosion. The torture scenes, which took place over seven or eight days out of the 2-month sequence, so alarmed the sensibilities of several editors that they cancelled the strip.

The reason offered by one editor (James Gannon of The Des Moines Register) is doubtless typical: children must not be exposed to such things as CANYON's torture scenes. Gannon admits that adults also read the comics, but he pretends nonetheless that "the funnies" are intended chiefly for children, despite the evidence of the last half-century that most comic strips are written for adult consumption. (Ironically, I suspect that when The Register promotes itself to attract new--and paying adult --readers, it, like most papers, includes in the list of its attractions "the best comics in the country"--thereby acknowledging that the comics are for adults. A fact confirmed by most readership surveys.)

By indulging his concern to protect the children of his readers, Gannon also shelters his adult readers. And his indulgence goes beyond the comics page. He says he applies the same standards to the news and editorial columns of his paper--and with that claim, Gannon paints himself into the loveliest of illogical corners.

Like most newspaper editors Gannon would doubtless defend his paper's First Amendment rights as being essential to the journalistic mission: to keep the public informed. Thus, he claims to be nurturing a mature and aware readership on the one hand--while on the other, he shelters his readers from the less appealing aspects of life, some of which are probably necessary to a mature grasp of the nature of reality.

His argument clearly won't

stand logical examination in the context of journalism's self-proclaimed function. But I've purposely excused Gannon (with the rest of us) from the burden of being logical. What is really at issue here is a matter of taste, one of the more illogical sources of human motivation.

Gannon admits the same: "Let's face it," he says, "By any standards of decency and good taste, the STEVE CANYON strip is brutal, disgusting, and offensive, a celebration of the darkest instincts in humanity."

So the real question is: did Caniff suffer a lapse in good taste? That admits of as many answers as there are questioners. But I say he didn't.

Undeniably, the torture scenes were fairly strong stuff. Convoy, suspended naked from the ceiling by her hair, was threatened on successive days with hot pokers, pinchers, and splinters under the fingernails. But this description sounds in words more explicitly repulsive than what was actually depicted in the strip.

There the bounds of decency were deligently observed. Convoy's nudity was carefully shielded by intervening foreground figures and by using compositions that involved facial closeups. The instruments of torture were employed only verbally; no act of torture was depicted. Lots of suggestion but no explicit drawings.

Caniff's offense, then, lay not in the manner of his storytelling so much as in his selection of torture as a subject. Did the master nod here?

Take a look at other serious strips on the same pages. Here in staid old MARY WORTH is a basketball player's wife being threatened with the unwanted sexual advances of her husband's drunken agent. In REX MORGAN, a wife-beating lawyer is having an extramarital affair until, in a fit of uncontrolled rage, he beats his mistress to death. And down the block a bit in KERRY DRAKE, we have a teenager who pushes dope in return for the sexual favors of her dealer.

None of this is graphically depicted; but all of it is there--suggested by dialog and action, just as the torture of Convoy is suggested.

The subjects of all these strips are mature, contemporary matters--many of them unsavory, repulsive, or disturbing. The picture of society that is presented is scarcely a white-washed picture, the sort of rosy view we expect to offer children. Serious strips have indeed grown up.

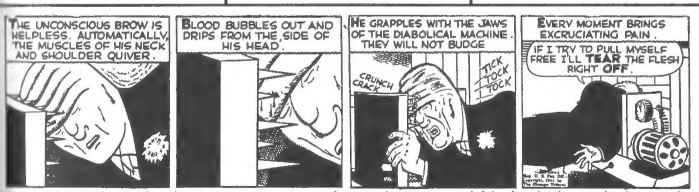
In this context, was Caniff's torture sequence out of place? Canyon is involved in international intrigue, and the torture of "political prisoners" is an acknowledged (if frowned upon here) fact of life in many of the countries through which Canyon is presumed to travel. In the context of the setting, Lynx's treatment of Convoy was, I submit, no more out of place than a teenage dope pusher is in KERRY DRAKE's city streets.

The torture sequence in CANYON is, as I said, pretty strong fare. But given Caniff's customary bent for realism and contemporary themes, the torture sequence is scarcely a gratuitous incident introduced solely for its sensational impact. It is, rather, part of a mature story in which it appears--a logical, realistic, and contemporary part, treated with restraint and taste.

Only one element in Caniff's mix is a bit jarring: the flippancy of Lynx's tone in describing the tortures she proposes. I suspect Caniff sought to blunt the sharp edges of the horrors Lynx describes by making her dialog light and flippant, so he unfurled his considerable wit in his accustomed manner. (A characteristic of Caniff's work is that daily strip installments often conclude on a light note--even a touch of outright comedy.) Unhappily, the effect of this maneuver was to make the subject and Lynx's behavior seem trivial. And that may have been too much for some editors. Still, it was not a lapse of taste here: it was a miscarriage of technique, a rarity with Caniff.

Logically, Caniff cannot be faulted, it seems to me. But then, no one has ever accused the human race of logical consistency and made the charge stick.

-HARV


THE UNCONSCIOUS BROW IS HELPLESS. AUTOMATICALLY, THE MUSCLES OF HIS NECK AND SHOULDER QUIVER.
BLOOD BUBBLES OUT AND DRIPS FROM THE SIDE OF HIS HEAD.
HE GRAPPLES WITH THE JAWS OF THE DIABOLICAL MACHINE. THEY WILL NOT BUDGE
CRUNCH CRACK
TICK TOCK TICK TOCK
EVERY MOMENT BRINGS EXCRUCIATING PAIN.
IF I TRY TO PULL MYSELF FREE I'LL TEAR THE FLESH RIGHT OFF.

TURE AND BRUTALITY in the interests of a good story (even if not wholly realistic) are not new in the comics page. DICK TRACY, for instance, was always good for a healthy slice of gore. Remember when the Summer Sisters turned the tables on the Brow, and his head, instead of one of their legs, wound up between the jaws of a spiked vice? We see what happens in graphic detail. (Oh--he does eventually tear himself loose, in a copious splattering of blood.)